QATAR
SAND, SEA AND SKY

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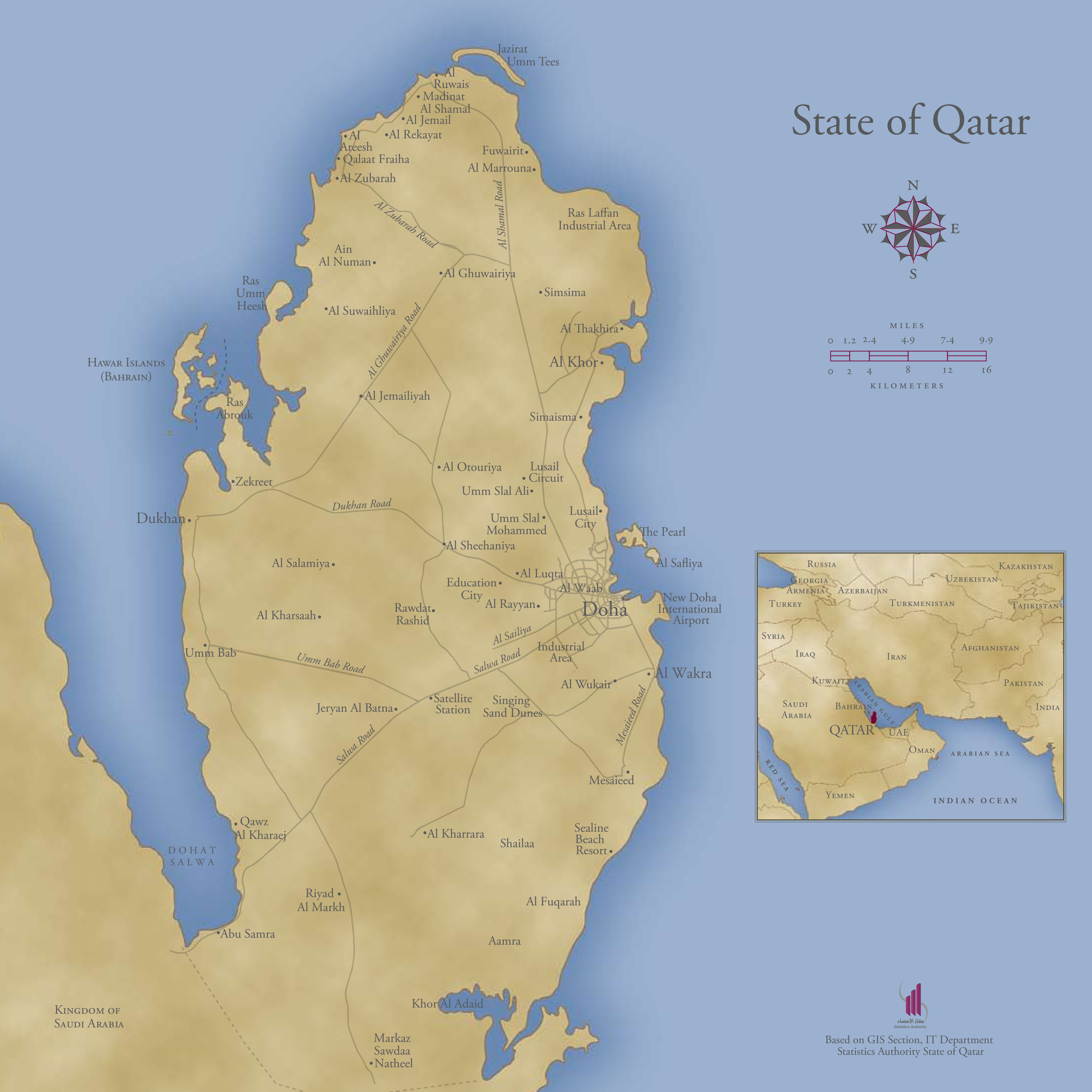
QATAR
SAND, SEA AND SKY

قطر
الرمل والبحر والسماء

Diana C. K. Untermeyer
Photography by Henry Dallal

bright sky press

State of Qatar



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A Special Word of Thanks

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I have known Diana since she moved to Doha with her incredibly active husband, Ambassador Chase Untermeyer. Diana is an inspiration to all who meet her. Upon her arrival, she immediately engaged in every community activity—from the horses she loves, to the environment, official engagements and various launches.

The Qataris are privileged to have someone from across the ocean be so dedicated to us, our nation and all that we believe in. Diana has not only been a great ambassador from the U.S. to the region, but she has also been an equally extraordinary ambassador on behalf of Qatar to the rest of the world. Through her numerous activities, she promotes the true colors of our country, and I am honored to be part of this publication. I am grateful for Diana's dedication and contribution, and though I have only recently gotten to know Henry Dallal, I thank him for showcasing Qatar in such beautiful photographs.

2010 proved to be a successful year for Qatar, culminating in the announcement that we will host the World Cup in 2022. To live up to this standard in 2011 would seem like a challenge. But the people of Qatar are prepared to meet that challenge and exceed expectations, not only for the World Cup but also for the long-term wellbeing of our country. *Qatar: Sand, Sea and Sky* highlights our proud history and our vision for the future.

Let me take this opportunity to invite you to explore Qatar in these pages and in person!

Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani

Doha, December 31, 2010





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> In the creation of the heavens and the earth, *and in the alternation of night and day, and the ships which sail through the sea with that which is of use to mankind, and the water which Allah sends down from the sky and makes the earth alive therewith after its death, and the moving creatures of all kinds that He has scattered therein, and in the veering of winds and clouds which are held between the sky and the earth, are indeed proofs for people of understanding.*
>
> – Qur'an 2:164, Surah Al-Baqarah



Chapter One: An Introduction to Qatar

The rhythm of our days was set, and we began learning to live in a society where prayer provides the ebb and flow of daily life.

(previous and above)
A dhow visible through a carved doorway at the Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al Thani museum; a restored minaret in Al Wakra

Into Arabia | My journey into Arabian nights and days began in April 2004 when my husband received a call from the White House asking him to serve as the U.S. ambassador to Qatar. On August 18 after a presidential appointment and a hurried packing up of the house, Chase, our then eleven-year-old daughter Elly, and I found ourselves flying over the shadowy waters of the Arabian Gulf. Had we arrived by day, we might have seen the entirety of the small Qatari peninsula, but on this clear night only the flaming beacons of the oil and gas industry stood out from the darkness. Shining as brightly as sports stadiums, highways extended from the capital city of Doha like spokes on a wheel, with no seeming destination except small clusters of twinkling lights.

When the door of the airplane opened, we were blanketed by soft, humid heat. Before it became a major international hub flying five-star, Qatari-flagged jets to a staggering list of destinations spanning Europe, Africa, Asia, Australia, and the United States, the old airport was built without jetways. At the bottom of the steps, a phalanx of embassy staff and white-robed bodyguards shepherded us into BMWs for the short ride to the VIP terminal. Little more than a glorified prefabricated cabin at that time, it was nonetheless a refuge from the teeming public terminal. In the lounge, the elegant Qatari chief of protocol greeted us—welcoming with his warm smile, romantic in his flowing robes and headdress encircled by the black rope *igal*.

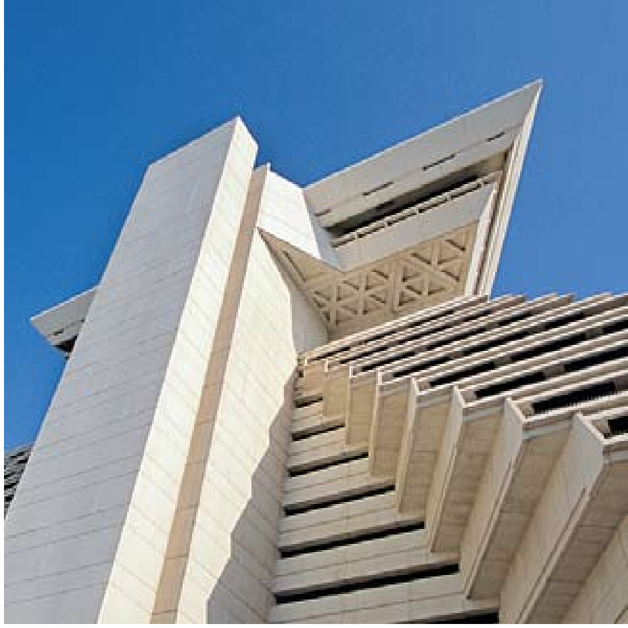
As we enjoyed fresh juice, U.S. embassy personnel handled immigration formalities before we were whisked to the embassy, where our staff (who would soon be like family) met us with homemade chocolate-chip cookies and brownies. The residence, a split-level home built by a Qatari who had lived in California, was quite worn, but the grounds were lovely with mature trees, flowers and a swimming pool. The residence has since moved to a recently developed West Bay neighborhood. The new residence is more modern, but, alas, the verdant gardens of the old house have been obliterated to make way for eight townhomes.

The next morning we were awakened by a chorus of muffled muezzin and searing light shooting from the edges of blackout curtains. The rhythm of our days was set, and we began learning to live in a society where prayer provides the ebb and flow of daily life. Islam in its pure and peaceful nature flourishes here. It is essentially impossible to consider the Gulf without setting it in a Muslim framework, which informs so much about traditional tribal behavior and governance, as well as the values that guide Qatar's journey into its unique modernity.

Bedouin life had always intrigued me. Having grown up with stories of Arabian horses, I harbored a lifelong dream of galloping through the desert on one of these mythic steeds. What little I knew about the life of the desert nomads also seemed akin to my family's experience as pioneers in Wyoming. My great-grandfather pushed cattle up the trail from Texas, and my grandfather was educated on our dryland ranches by his mother. During breaks from lessons he memorized poetry, and he was an adept storyteller. Into his nineties, he still captivated listeners with tales of the Old West.

From harsh environments like the Middle Eastern desert and the killing winters of America's northern plains, distinctive societies evolved, emphasizing pride, perseverance and hospitality, as well as a strong oral tradition and a thirst for spiritual fulfillment. The corresponding unwritten code of the Bedouin resonates with the cowboy stories I grew up with and even more so with the lives of the American Indians whom early settlers pushed out. It is tempting to be swept up in the illusion that one knows another culture simply because of similarities to one's own, or to fall into the trap of cultural romanticism so common to travelers in the Orient. Outsiders are genuinely welcomed, even honored, in Arabia, yet they rarely become part of it. This applies not only to westerners but even to Arabs not of Gulf origin, who seldom integrate fully into local society. So while I have been flattered to be told, "You are a Qatari!" or, more exotically, to be called Diana of Doha, I never lose sight that some subtlety of culture always awaits discovery, which is why I return often in answer to the desert's siren call.

I have great admiration for the intrepid Western female explorers in Arabia—Lady Ann Blount, Gertrude Bell, Freya Stark and others—but my adventure was different. The Qataris of this century live in towns and cities, not in Bedouin tents or the isolated sea-centered villages of pre-oil days. My time in Qatar coincided with what will surely be known as a pivotal time in its transition to modernity. Learning about the traditions of the past was indispensable to understanding the Qatar of today and tomorrow. The change has been so recent that today's worldly executive may have grown up with parents or grandparents who roamed the desert, traded for goods at a rudimentary market, or combed the sea for fish and pearls.



(above and following) Sharp angles of the Sheraton Hotel; the State Mosque inspired by Al Qobaib mosque commissioned in 1878 by Sheikh Qassim bin Mohammed, the founder of Qatar, to memorialize the death of his father

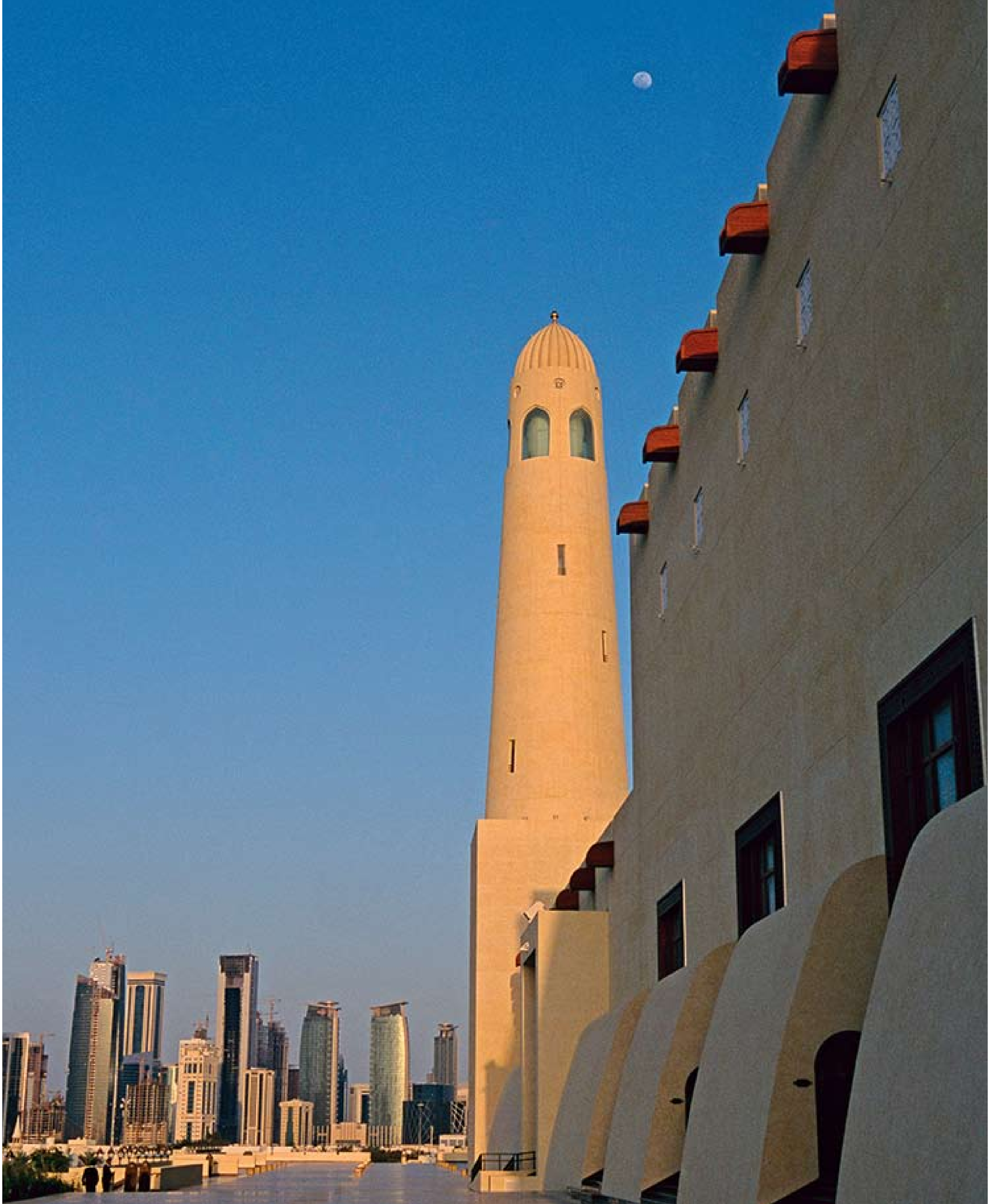
Journey into Tradition and Modernity |

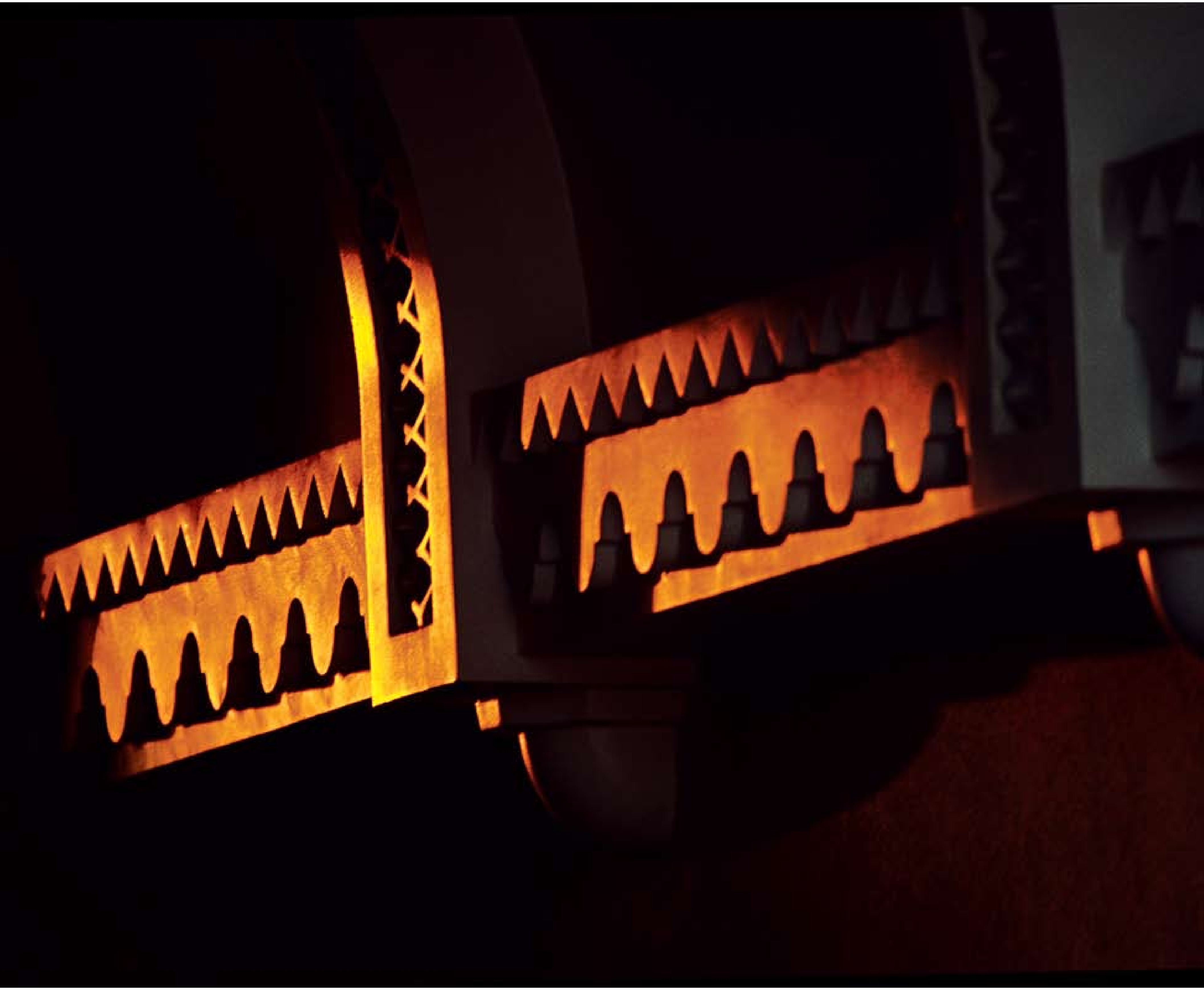
Qatar has a rich cultural heritage and began developing a distinct political identity through centuries-long contacts with Bahrain, the Arabian Peninsula, Persia, India, East Africa, the Ottoman Empire and Great Britain. But because it became a fully independent country only in 1971, Qatar as a nation is still close to its roots. Furthermore, the Emir, His Highness Sheikh Hamad **bin** Khalifa Al Thani, assumed power in 1995, and his wide-reaching plans took some years to bear fruit. Our family experienced this Qatar—a young country with a mighty dream and the petrocurrency to bring that vision to life. Before our eyes, a dynamic city emerged from a modest skyline and a lot of excavation sites topped by building cranes. We lived in a time-lapse world, as twenty-four-hour-a-day work schedules made buildings soar, floor by floor, seemingly overnight.

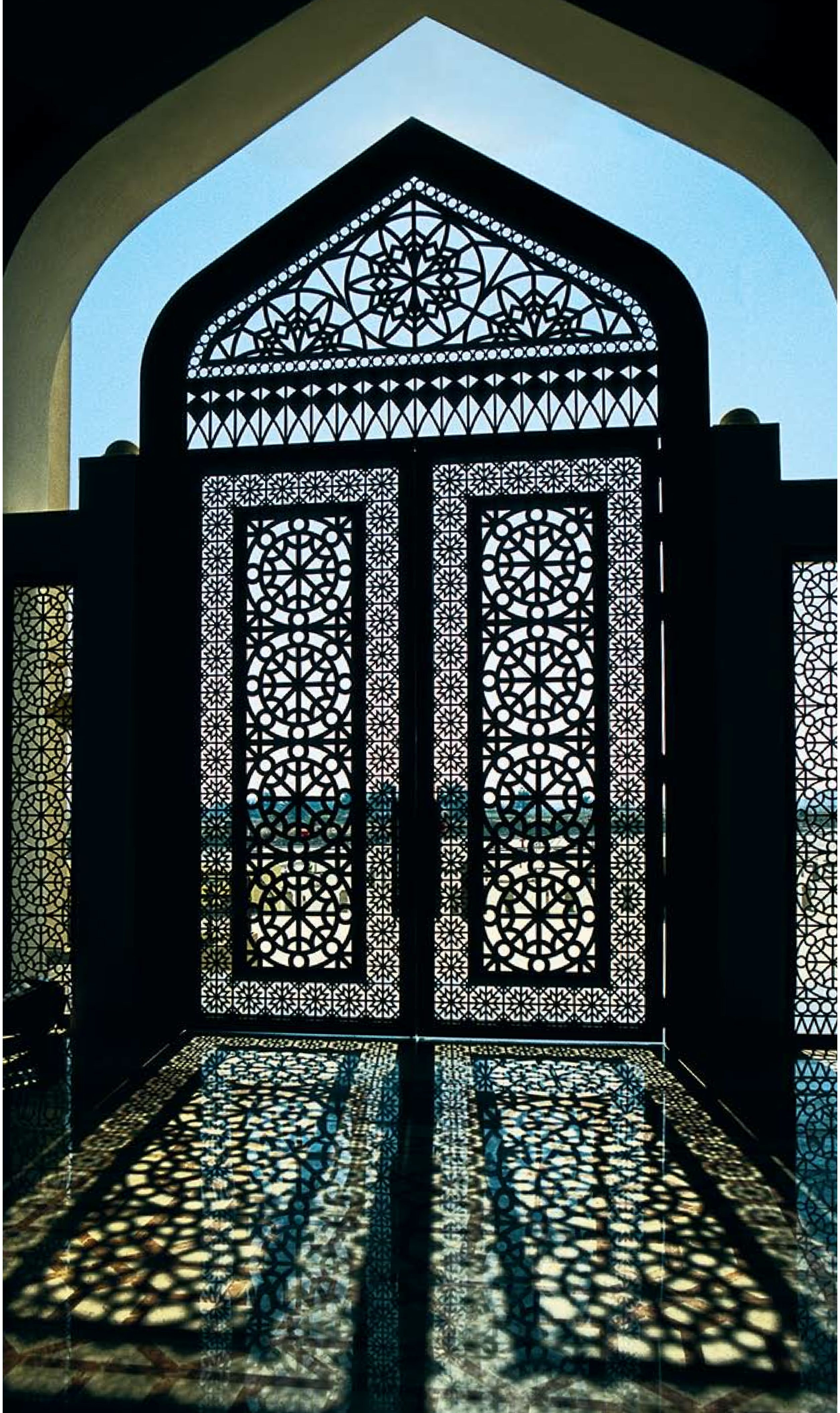
Bin *means "son of" while* bint *means "daughter of." Over coffee one day, a Qatari friend sketched his paternal lineage from memory to his sixteenth grandfather. This "back family" is important to an Arab's sense of self and his place within the tribe.*

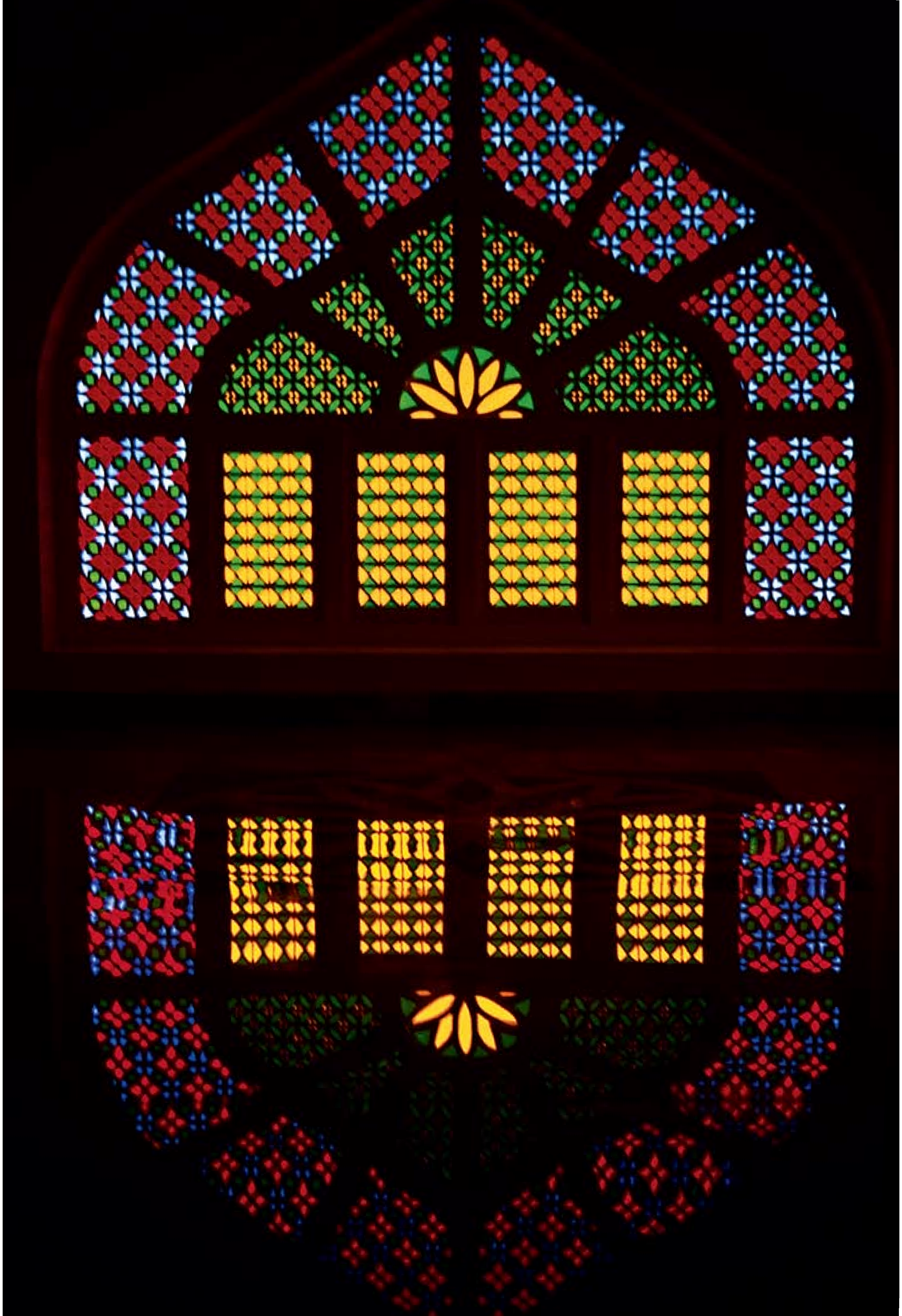
As recently as the 1980s, amenities like grocery stores and surfaced roads were scarce. When the ziggurat-shaped Sheraton Hotel opened in 1982, it was the first architectural landmark on **Doha**'s crescent-shaped Corniche. It became an instant tourist attraction; locals came in droves to admire the vast, elegant lobby.

Doha, dohat *in Arabic means bay.*













Now, like a giant sculpture garden, the skyline of downtown Doha intrigues from every vantage point.

The hotel stood alone on a rocky flatland extending to the horizon. Previously, not a tree dotted the landscape where the hotel's popular beach club now nestles in a lush garden. Traveling north of the Sheraton construction site to today's heavily populated West Bay required a four-wheel drive.

Now, like a giant sculpture garden, the skyline of downtown Doha intrigues from every vantage point. Its exotic angles glisten in the sun and engrave the night sky with bold silhouettes. Less flashy but more fundamental, an entirely new infrastructure strives to keep pace with mind-boggling population growth. Roads, schools, industrial complexes, housing, hospitals, a country-wide bus system, a new airport, light rail, water, sewage and desalination systems are just a few of the projects. Locals and expatriates alike grumble about the disruptions caused by the traffic and construction, but given the population explosion, it is difficult to contemplate an alternative.

No formal census data exists before the 1970s, but estimates are available. In 1908, a British observer declared there were 27,000 residents in Qatar. Economic hardship brought on by the collapse of the natural pearl market caused an out-migration, leaving the population at a low of about 16,000 in 1949. With the development of oil resources in the 1950s, the population grew again: A 1970 census reported 111,113 people, of whom more than 40 percent were identified as Qataris. By 1977, that number was 200,000, of whom 65,000 were non-citizens. A high birth rate combined with a robust influx of labor resulted in an estimate of 480,000 in 1992, 744,029 in 2004 and 1,696,563 in 2010. The Qatar Statistics Authority projects the population to grow to 2.5 million by 2020.

(below and opposite)
The crescent-shaped Corniche; public art, such as the *dallah,* Arabic coffee pot, adorn Doha's parks and traffic circles



Oil and gas fuel the economic engine that drives Qatar's audacious plan, yet the Emir provides the spark. While he was heir apparent, Sheikh Hamad held many posts which prepared him for future leadership. But more than mere time on task, it has been the Emir's compassionate, pragmatic and confident character that has led Qatar to prominence on the world stage.

This confidence manifests itself in brave decision-making that challenges the political, economic and social status quo. When the Emir acceded to power in 1995, oil income had raised the standard of living in Qatar, but it was still known as a sleepy place relative to its Gulf neighbors. In the face of a depressed global gas market in the 1990s, Sheikh Hamad daringly asserted that soon Qatar would be the largest natural gas exporter in the world. Then, even though it seemed a pipedream to many industry insiders, he took the risk of floating enormous bonds to obtain the working capital to realize this goal. Providentially, the present-day ExxonMobil shared his optimism about Qatar's potential as an industry leader and entered into a joint venture that thrives today alongside many other multinational partnerships.

Using Qataris as cheap labor, a British consortium in the 1930s started developing the oil fields of Dukhan on the west coast. After a hiatus necessitated by World War II, the first oil exportation took place in December 1949 and was celebrated in grand style on February 2, 1950. In subsequent years, Sheikh Khalifa bin Hamad Al Thani, then heir apparent and later Emir, adeptly nationalized mineral rights and abrogated the agreements that gave monopolistic rights to the British. He also became a founding member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), which demanded fair prices for producing nations. Rather than receiving paltry royalties, Qatar negotiated majority-stake agreements and built downstream industries. The subsequent income led to the first wave of development that included schools, hospitals and basic services like electricity and water distribution.

Currently, the economy benefits from conservative oil price assumptions. Until recently, the assumption was $35 a barrel; in 2010 it was $55 a barrel. This regularly results in fiscal surpluses and the capacity to weather down-years. Surpluses from the hydrocarbon industry, including oil, gas and related petrochemical companies, have grown the sovereign wealth fund to unknown multiples of billions.

This fund, known as the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), invests in diverse assets on behalf of the state to provide long-term financial security for the country. The QIA board is chaired by His Highness the Heir Apparent Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani. The Chief Executive is Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, who is both prime minister and foreign minister. Qatari Diar Real Estate Investment Company and Barwa are two of QIA's dynamic mechanisms for wealth creation and high-quality, socially-responsible real estate development. At this point in Qatar's development, the links between industry, finance and governance are tight; without this powerful and consistent leadership, Qatar might not have the economic might or the social will to accomplish its ambitious goals.

In 1996, when the current Emir's government was newly installed, one of its most far-reaching initiatives was abolishing the Ministry of Information, which had been in charge of censorship, and concurrently creating the Al Jazeera satellite network. Al Jazeera proved an immediate sensation in Arabic and now broadcasts in English



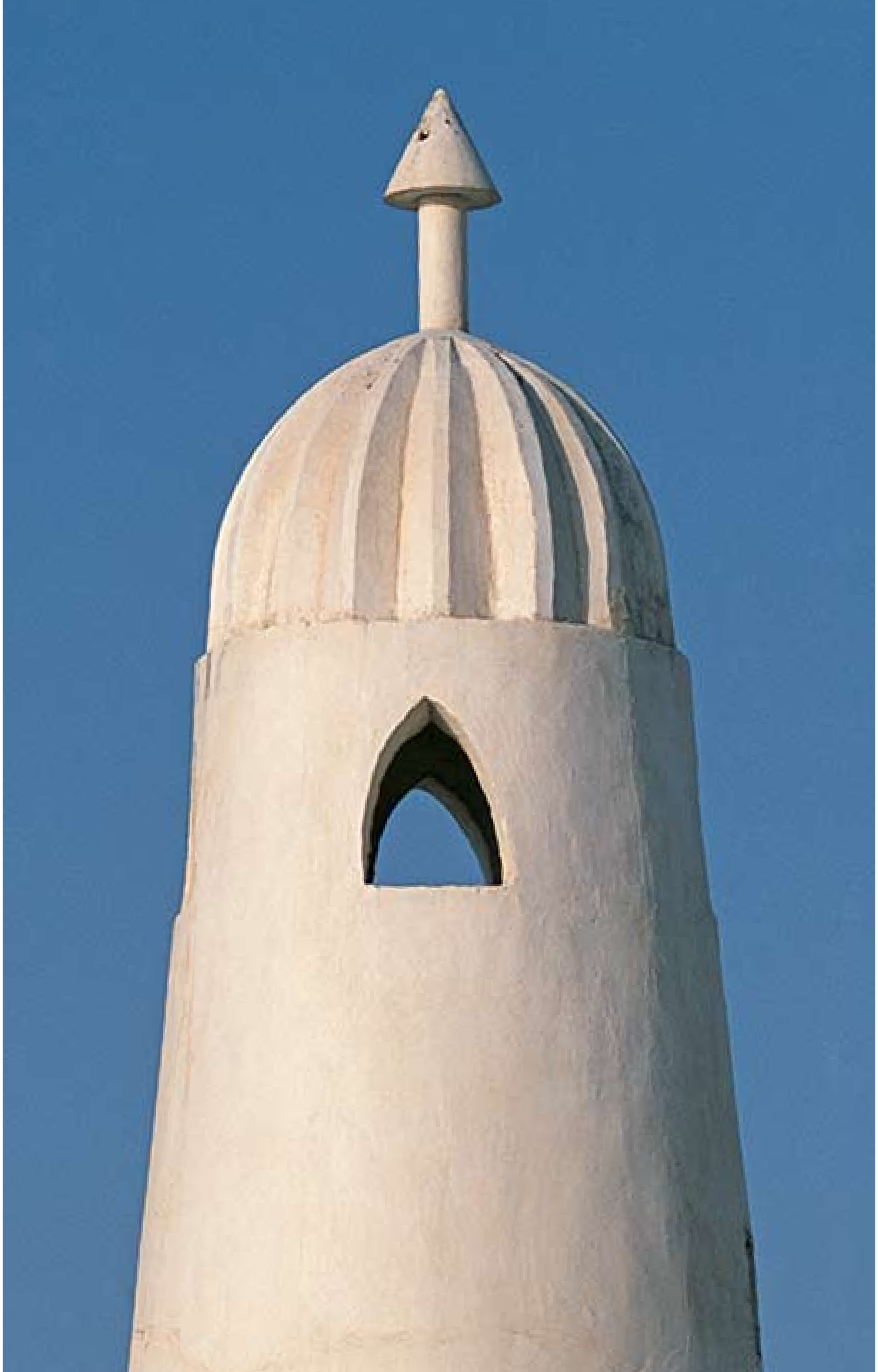
This fund, known as the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), invests in diverse assets on behalf of the state to provide long-term financial security for the country.

(following)

Souq Waqif stables; Al Wakra minaret; timeless horses against a contemporary skyline; fountains and the arabesque-topped Four Seasons towers











Even with criticism and differences of opinion considered, Al Jazeera has caused a new day of media freedom to dawn over the Middle East.

as well. At a time when many news agencies are closing bureaus, Al Jazeera is expanding at a rapid rate. Never shying away from controversy, Al Jazeera has provoked worldwide ire as it replaced what had passed for television news in the region—chiefly recitations of government press releases and the harangues of maximum leaders—with full and often incendiary coverage of the Afghanistan and Iraq conflicts, criticism of authoritarian regimes, interviews with opposition leaders, live reporting from Israel, and previously unheard-of public debate.

Particularly in the early days, questions arose about Al Jazeera's journalistic professionalism. Critics note that events in Qatar are rarely broadcast on Al Jazeera. Network managers respond to this by saying Al Jazeera is an international station: What happens right outside their doors rarely is important enough to report. Certainly, the network gave extensive coverage to the only anti-western terrorist incident in Doha to date, a suicide bombing in 2005 that killed one innocent person. Even with criticism and differences of opinion considered, Al Jazeera has caused a new day of media freedom to dawn over the Middle East.

Continuing the groundbreaking reform, Sheikh Hamad recognized that, given the needs of a country of less than 200,000 citizens, women should and must be equal partners in the future. The Emir confronted the cultural norms of the male-dominated region and put women on a public par with men. In 1995 when the Emir appointed his consort, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, as chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, women rarely if ever held official positions. In this role, Sheikha Moza launched a campaign to transform education from one of rote learning to one that stresses critical thinking and problem solving. The cornerstone for all the country's aspirations is education; placing this critical reform in the hands of a woman demonstrated the Emir's deep commitment to utilize the best talent available, regardless of gender.



After a mere decade and a half, Qatar Foundation's Education City houses a collection of world-class degree-granting institutions, all with co-educational classes and instruction in English. Currently, these institutions and their academic fields are: Virginia Commonwealth University, design; Texas A&M, engineering; Carnegie-Mellon, computer science and business; Northwestern University, communications and journalism; University College of London, archaeology and museum studies; Weill-Cornell, medicine; Georgetown University, international affairs; and the Qatar Faculty of Islamic Studies. More are coming. While many students, including an increasing number of women, still go overseas to study, Education City provides important options.



(previous, above and following)
Al Jazeera newsroom; Qatar Foundation's Education City: shade structure at Qatar Academy, Ceremonial Court designed by Arata Isozaki, Weill-Cornell Medical School, nighttime graduation celebrated with Her Highness Sheikha Moza

Other alternatives for higher education include Qatar University (QU); University of Calgary-Qatar Nursing School; the Community College of Qatar, developed in partnership with the Houston Community College system; and the College of the North Atlantic-Qatar. QU, Sheikha Moza's alma mater, has separate campuses for men and women. The College of the North Atlantic is a junior college that provides extensive vocational training ranging from business and emergency medical training to machine tooling. To prepare students for these rigorous programs, education reform extends into the elementary and secondary levels of instruction. English is now mandatory and course work focuses on problem-solving rather than memorization.

Qatar Foundation also oversees a multi-billion dollar endowment to bring business and research together at the Qatar Science and Technology Park located adjacent to Education City. Fully 2.8 percent of the Qatari gross domestic product is set aside for research each year. Attracting high-profile partners to commercialize technology is part of a strategic plan to develop a sustainable economy based on brainpower, not just hydrocarbons. Other projects include an impressive convention center and hospital, both of which will be magnets for entrepreneurs, research and development.

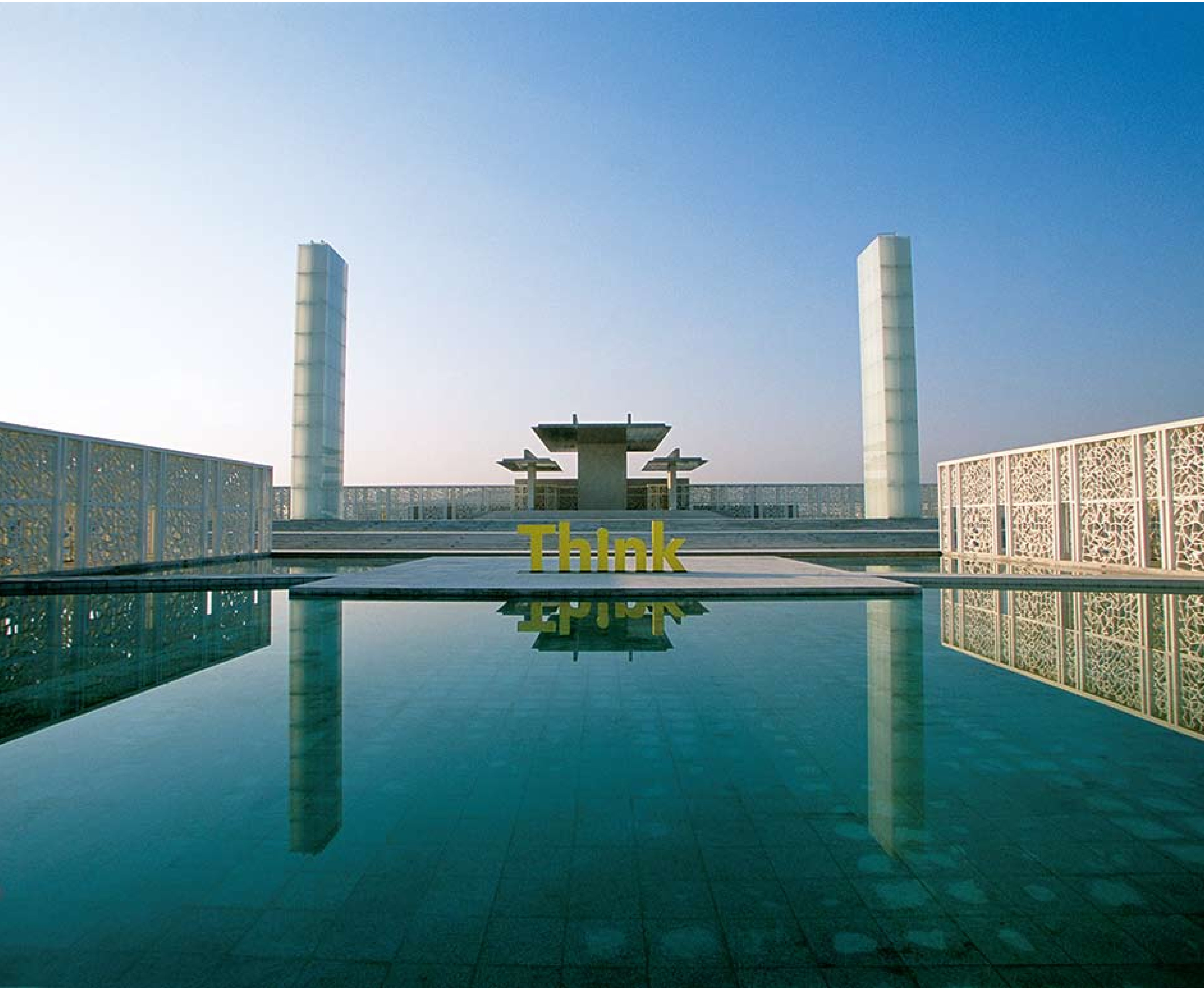
Sheikha Moza's commitment to education led her to participate in a televised appearance at the groundbreaking of the Weill-Cornell Medical School in Doha in October 2003. This was the first time she and the Emir attended a public event together. A small number of female newscasters and professional women like physicians and educators began appearing in news stories in the 1970s; however, this was the first time the First Lady was broadcast on television. Only strong leaders surround themselves with talented people, and within the strictures of the Middle East, the latitude given to Sheikha Moza to succeed is even more profound. She is an inspiration, particularly for women wishing to excel academically and professionally. As young people race to be diplomats, petroleum engineers, brain surgeons, designers, or whatever career they choose, nothing now seems out of reach.

In the political realm, the Emir not only extended the vote to women in first-ever elections for a municipal council in 1999, but he also encouraged them to stand as candidates, forestalling debate over universal suffrage. While none of the eight female candidates triumphed in that initial democratic experience, a woman won a seat in a subsequent election. At the same time, newly empowered women took to the roads behind the wheels of their own cars and continue to do so in exponentially-increasing numbers. While I know a **sheikha** who learned to drive in her forties, teenage girls today start lobbying their parents for cars and drivers licenses much like their peers abroad. Some women still prefer the convenience of a driver, however.

Any female member of the ruling Al Thani family is a sheikha*; the male equivalent is a sheikh. Respected religious scholars often receive the honorific of sheikh as well.*

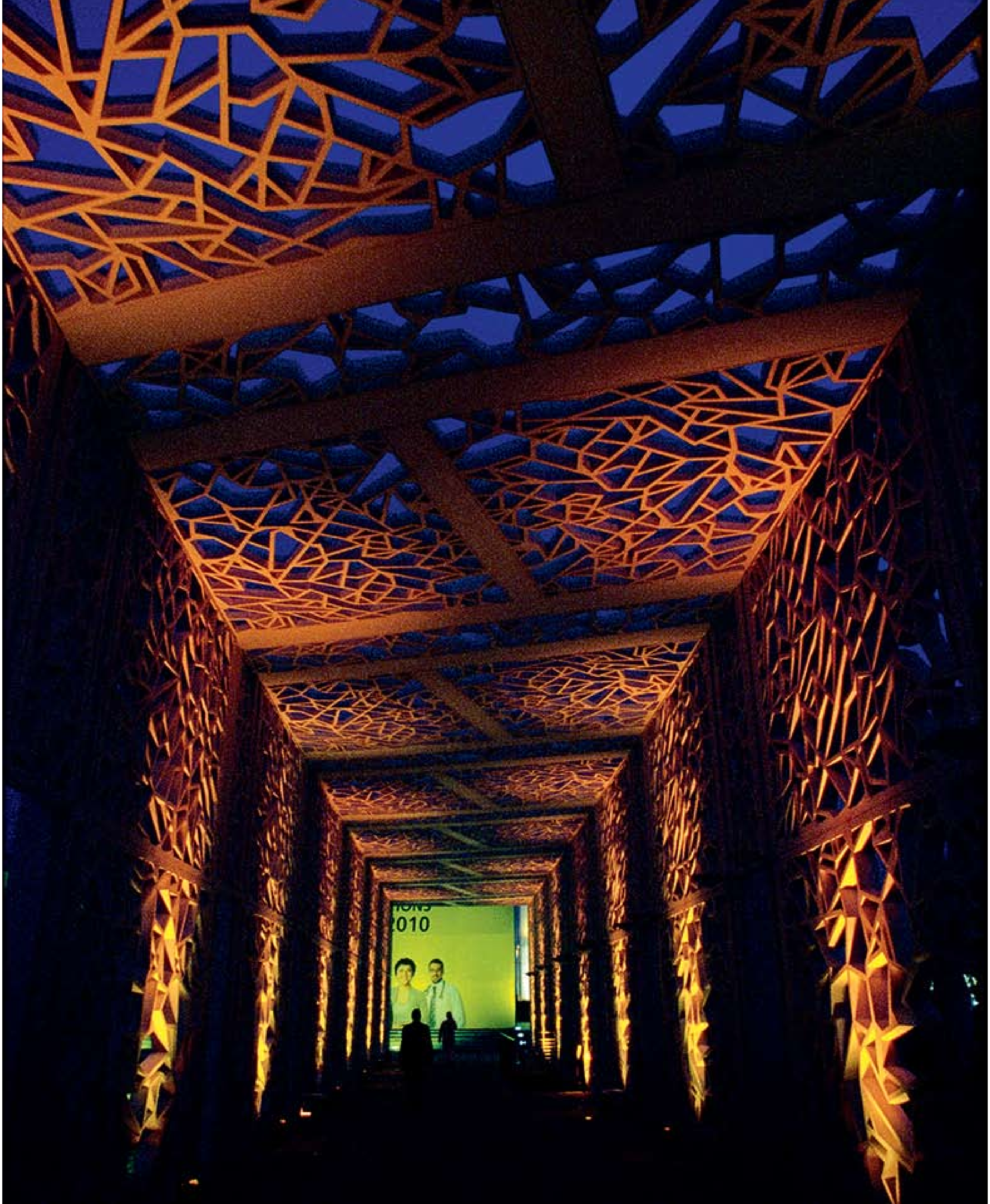


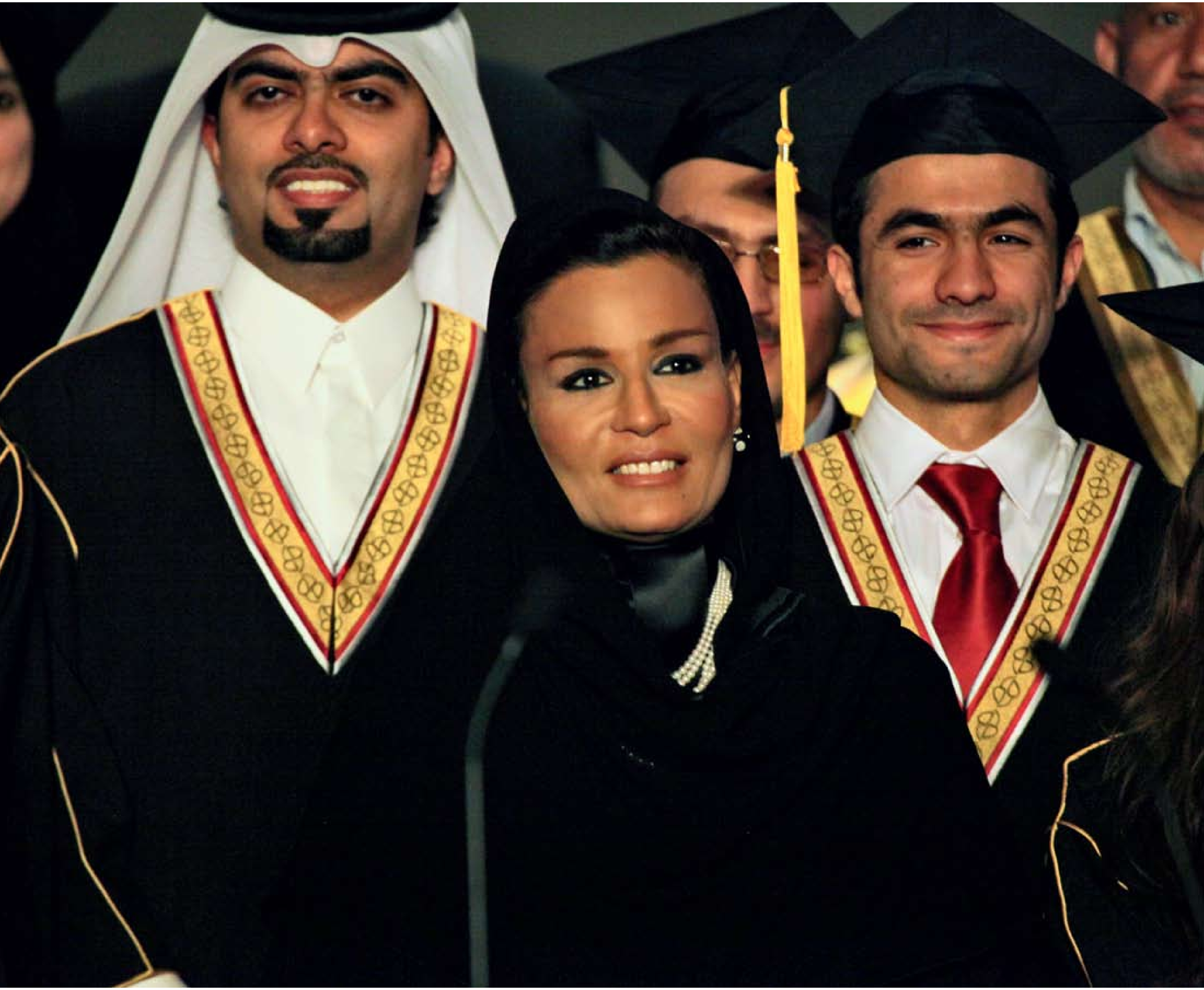



Think




SENIOR '10
CONVOCATION


2010











(above, opposite and following) Faces in Souq Waqif: a father fingering a *misbaha*, prayer beads, sits with his son; a Persian worker who pushes shoppers' purchases in a wheel-barrow; the Emiri Diwan houses official reception rooms and offices for the Emir and his staff

The challenge is immeasurable: To transform within one generation a conservative, hard-scrabble subsistence society into one with the highest per-capita income in the world, without losing desirable traditions and ethics in the process.

Paradoxically, the empowerment of women is not new. Current reforms return them to the central role they played in the pre-oil era. With the exception of women in a few wealthy merchant families, idleness was not an option. Bedouin women—and children, for that matter—worked hard around camp, caring for livestock, weaving, cooking, packing up heavy woolen tents, and bartering their handicrafts in the market for grain, rice and dates. Women held the family together. Whether they lived in a tent, a simple adobe-like house or a palm frond hut, they cared for their children and conspicuously took full responsibility for the family during the pearling season, when many of the men were gone for months at a time. Modern women are mostly professionals, but there is also a lively fine art scene, and programs at the social development center inspire new artisans.

Focusing on the people of Qatar—roughly 200,000 citizens and more than 1.5 million expatriate workers —is the hallmark of the Emir's reign. It marks the inception of a new Qatar, one that honors tradition while building a superhighway to the future. The goal of modernity is not Westernization. Instead, it is to use best practices to compete in the global economy while nurturing the country's core values of family, faith and tradition.

A thumb-shaped peninsula—smaller than Connecticut and larger than Cyprus—jutting north into the Arabian Gulf, Qatar has forged an assertive foreign policy that has won global attention despite the country's small population and modest size. Qatar made both history and headlines when it became the first Gulf nation to establish overt ties with Israel. Political and religious leaders from both Israel and the Jewish diaspora have participated in Doha's frequent global conferences and interfaith dialogues alongside their international peers. In another unprecedented move, the Qatari government donated land for the construction of Christian churches in Qatar. The first of these, a Roman Catholic church, opened on Easter Sunday in 2008.

Both the Emir and Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim Al Thani, the prime minister and foreign minister, are known for intercontinental diplomacy. Qatar sought and won the so-called "Arab seat" on the UN Security Council, and in so doing had to withstand the inevitable storms that result from casting on-the-record votes during the two-year term (2006-2007). Its pursuit of open relationships with countries and groups of such widely different views as Iran, Israel, Hamas, Hezbollah, Syria, Cuba, Venezuela, China, Europe and the United States has, unsurprisingly, caused disquiet on all sides. Qatar believes that such ties both protect its interests and allow it to influence regional and even global politics as an international conflict mediator, notably in Lebanon, Darfur, Yemen and Gaza.

Engaging with Iran and Arab political movements while hosting the U.S. military headquarters responsible for operations in Iraq and Afghanistan is a tightrope act that is scrutinized and criticized by all sides. Political factors, as well as a practical budgetary decision to expend wealth on education and development rather than on weapons, led Qatar to construct the Al Udeid air base outside Doha in 1995. As Qatar hoped, Al Udeid attracted the interest of the United States, which began using it in 1996 after agreeing with Riyadh that American forces should leave Saudi soil. While Al Udeid may be a potential target, it also acts as a deterrent to aggression.

To date, Qatar has resolved all border disputes. But with Saudi Arabia on its southern border and a potentially nuclear-armed Iran across the narrow Gulf, it remains a small and extremely rich country sandwiched between powerful neighbors. In this position, foreign policy places a premium on building alliances. Strong regional

ties are built unilaterally as well as through the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf, also known as the GCC. In March 2011, Qatar complied with the Arab League's call for action against Libyan leader Muammar Gadhafi by sending fighter jets to enforce a U.N. no-fly zone. At the same time, Qatar Petroleum arranged to sell Libyan petroleum to give anti-Gadhafi forces vitally-needed funds.

When not pursuing his comprehensive agenda, the Emir enjoys walking through projects like Souq Waqif, the redesigned old market, and talking with whomever he encounters. Born into the traditional tribal structure in which sheikhs listened to petitioners and decided individual claims, Sheikh Hamad has built modern governmental and legal structures to handle disputes equitably and efficiently. In this time of striving and adjustment, governance is less about emiri decrees and more about providing incentives for Qataris to take advantage of opportunities in education and the professions—all precursors to their country's transition into a working democracy.

The challenge is immeasurable: To transform within one generation a conservative, hard-scrabble subsistence society into one with the highest per-capita income in the world, without losing desirable traditions and ethics in the process. Wealth is an extraordinary blessing, *al humdulillah*, thanks be to God. But just as in stories about lottery winners, it can also be a bane. Wildfire change can cause social upheaval. While community responsibility is part of the culture of both Islam and the desert, wealth and opportunity have flooded the country so fast that it has been a struggle to catch up with existing realities. And, comprising less than one-seventh of total residents, Qataris are a minority in their own country.

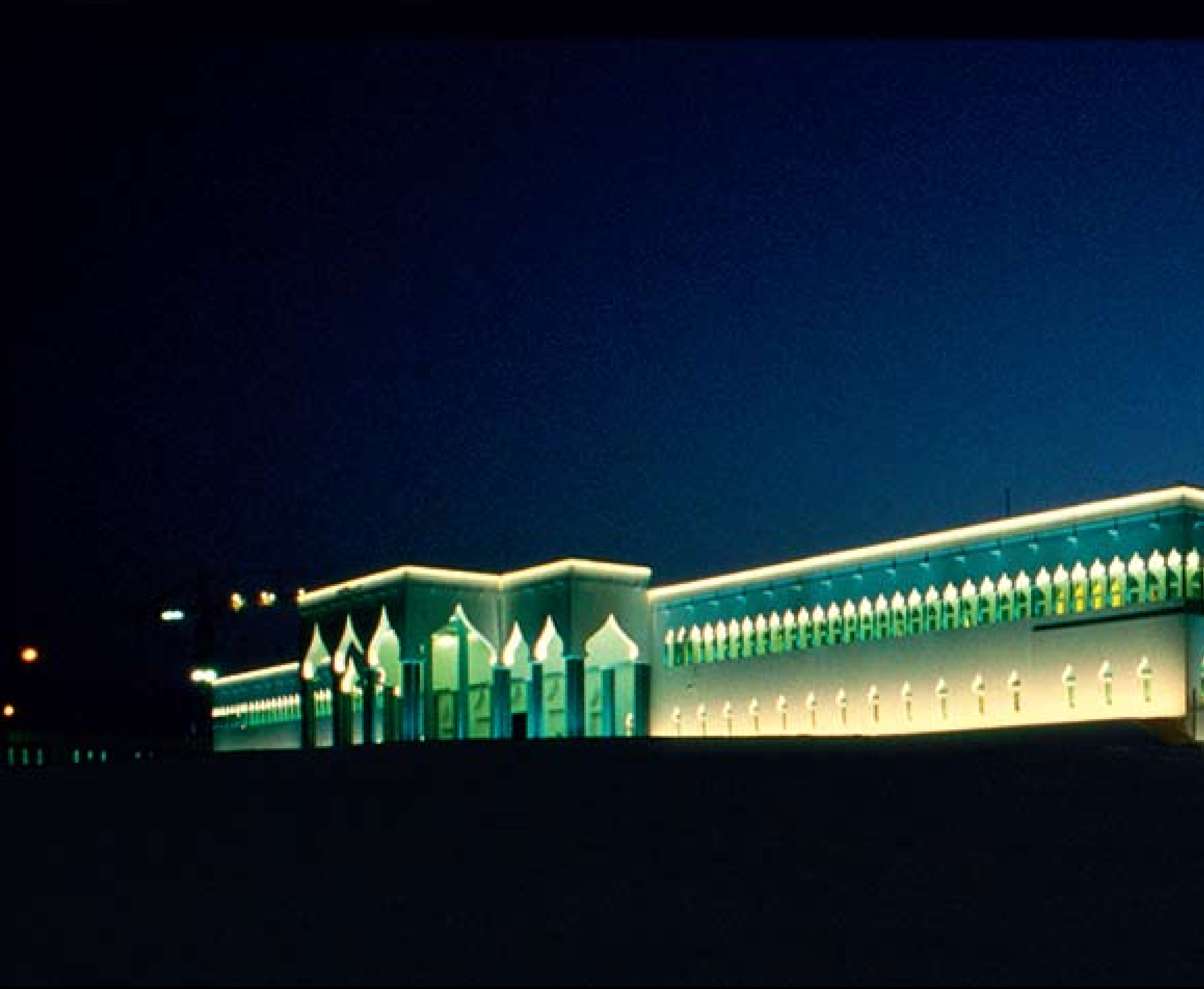
Only a generation or two ago, Qataris lived either as nomads—the *bedu* or Bedouin—or as traders, coastal fishermen and pearl fishers—known as *hadher* or settled. This small group must learn to balance having wealth with the obligation to care for the legions of foreign workers who are opening businesses, managing and manning projects, practicing professions, digging holes, cleaning houses and playing a significant role in raising children. The rights of immigrant laborers clash with a sponsorship system which requires expatriates to have a citizen sponsor who controls significant aspects of daily life—like traveling overseas and working for another employer. The National Human Rights Committee offers complainants a voice, and other initiatives provide low-cost housing and healthcare and more systematic enforcement of the existing labor laws.

With such a tiny population, Qatar must protect both its unique character and its resources. Thus new citizenship is limited. While Qataris may be a demographic minority in their country, they are still its cultural majority, and they want to keep it that way. On the other hand, the ongoing need for foreigners—from the backbone skills of migrant laborers to the expertise of professionals —necessitates the development of rational systems to incorporate expatriates into the fabric of national life.

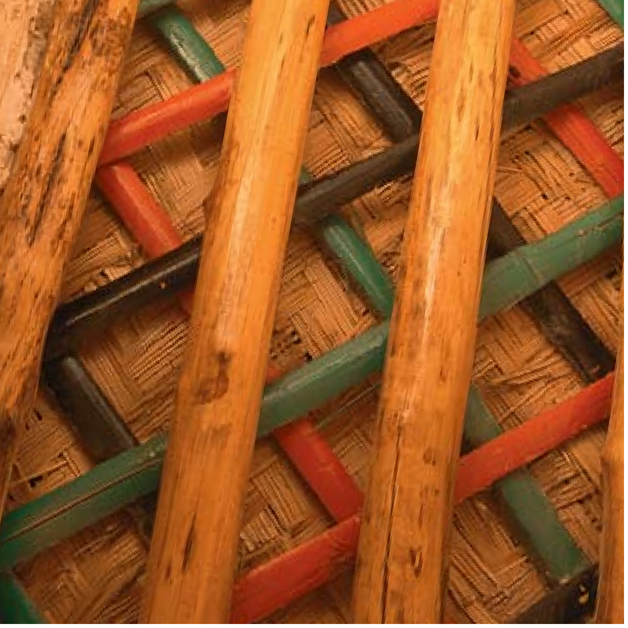
These complex legal and humanitarian issues differ vastly from those faced in the recent past. A Qatari born in 1950 may well remember not having enough to eat, or watching fathers and brothers leave to take manual jobs in the new oil fields in Dukhan. Running water and electricity were virtually unknown, except for scattered generators at the sheikh's palace and the houses of a very few affluent merchants. Donkeys, camels or a man with a wooden yoke balancing two pails hauled water from local wells.



Born into the traditional tribal structure in which sheikhs listened to petitioners and decided individual claims, Sheikh Hamad has built modern governmental and legal structures to handle disputes equitably and efficiently.







(above, opposite and following) Ceiling lattice commonly used in traditional Gulf construction; Qatar University's architecture reflects the traditional wind tower which provides natural ventilation; wind tower and door detail at the Sheikh Ghanim bin Abdulrahman Al Thani house in Al Wakra

Greetings in the Gulf are still a dance of words as ritualistic exchanges of peace and the ubiquitous query, "*Esh alakhbar*," literally, "What is the news?" carry tradition up through the centuries.

Qatar's economic low point was caused by the arrival of Japan's cultured pearls on the world market in the 1920s. The new, less expensive cultured pearl crushed the demand for Qatar's primary export commodity, natural pearls, and World War II delayed the development of newly-discovered oil reserves. As the population was reduced to dismal poverty, men and even entire families and tribes migrated to Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Iran to eke out a living and keep their children from starving. Qatar now has an enviable GDP with modern hospitals and entire school systems springing up in outlying towns as well as in the capital city of Doha.

This dramatic rise in the standard of living has had the unintended consequences of inflation and a new culture of consumption that leaves many prosperous people feeling poor as society puts a premium on material goods. Young men worry about being able to pay the dowry required for marriage—including elaborate weddings, housing, cars and a driver—as well as the possibility of having to care for aging parents. Lack of financial management skills can lead to squandering government-provided financial resources or taking bank loans for luxury items that lead to long-term debt.

In contrast, consider that in 1952, there was only one school in Qatar, an elementary school for boys with about 240 students and six teachers. The first school for girls opened in 1955. Before then, some students, primarily boys living in or around small towns and villages, might learn basics like reading and writing from a local Qur'anic scholar. A friend born in the early 1960s recalls piling into the back of a pickup truck with other boys from his north coast village to bounce over rough roads to a small school. At that time, many Bedouin were still living a nomadic life, and illiteracy was the rule. But even without much formal education, Qatari *bedu* produced beautiful and complex poetry and transmitted it by word of mouth, the timeless medium of desert travelers. Greetings in the Gulf are still a dance of words as ritualistic exchanges of peace and the ubiquitous query, "*Esh alakhbar*," literally, "What is the news?" carry tradition up through the centuries, from times when meeting a fellow wanderer of the desert was an occasion for hospitality and a gathering of information.

The lives of parents and grandparents were simple, measured in necessities—food, shelter and protection of families. Life was basic, physical. Tribal laws held sway. Complex rules of protection and retribution were part of an unwritten code. Currently, civil codes and court systems are replacing the traditional justice of families and sheikhs. Basic math and reading skills were for reading the Qur'an and keeping merchant accounts, whereas education today is valued as the fundamental building block for a successful life.

Qatar National Vision 2030, launched in October 2008, focuses on four pillars of development—human, social, economic and environmental—that together articulate Qatar's clear intent to be a modern nation. The plan pays special attention to the social contract with its own citizens addressing questions such as "What is a fair distribution of wealth from the hydrocarbon windfall?" In the distant past, even the leading families had relatively small fortunes, and everyone else was on a par, basically subsistence-level. Those who could afford to share practiced *zakat*, the mandatory annual giving to the poor amounting to about 2.5 percent of one's wealth and *sadaqah*, voluntary charity above that level. They provided fundamentals like clothes, bags of rice and sugar to the less fortunate. In the early oil years, however, the society became increasingly stratified as a few Qataris profited disproportionately. Thus, a conscious effort is being made to implement a policy that guarantees that every citizen in perpetuity will benefit from the economic boom.

The goal is to develop a productive middle class. But because of the robust per-capita income, Qatar is well above customary measures. For example, by international standards, no Qataris live in poverty; instead, Qatar has identified a relative poverty line to ensure a dignified and equitable life for all citizens. Providing meaningful jobs is an essential part of this process, and "Qatarization" is a government policy to encourage companies to hire local citizens. Excellence in education is the means to achieve this goal, because the skills needed to keep Qatar in the hands of Qataris are technical, intellectual and managerial. Work is focused not in the home but in office buildings, laboratories and industrial sites.

Change of this magnitude usually evolves over centuries. In Qatar, it comes quickly and relatively seamlessly. Naturally, not everyone is of one mind. There is both nostalgia for the simple, unhurried life of decades past and religious concern that society is moving away from its conservative fundamentals. The *fereej*—neighborhoods delineated by families or tribes and usually bearing their names—are still prevalent. Yet, as the population grows and land gets scarcer and more expensive, families are living farther apart, often in single-family dwellings rather than with extended families. Faced with busy lives and congested streets, families who once gathered daily must now carefully set aside a day or a meal per week to get together. New standards of education also put a strain on families as they see their children pressured to succeed in rigorous new school and university programs. As English becomes the dominant language of instruction and business, Qataris worry that **Arabic** fluency is in decline.

There is a difference between spoken, colloquial Arabic and literary or classical Arabic, which is very difficult to master. Classical Arabic is revered as the language of the Qur'an and is used for newspapers and provides commonality across the multicultural Arab world.









Modest dress—the graceful, floor-sweeping robe called an *abaya* and the matching headscarf, the *shayla*—derives from religion; the black color, from tradition.

(above, opposite and following) The sleeve of a colorful *abaya*, a member of the women's show jumping team; a *batoola*-clad woman shopping at the wholesale vegetable market; a photographer with henna-patterned hands at a National Day parade; enjoying fresh bread in Souq Waqif

Land use debates create another source of tension. Substantial development projects and urban enhancements like major parks were not anticipated in early city plans and have required large sections of land to be taken by eminent domain. Landholders are generously compensated, but this can seem like small consolation when their homes go under the wrecking ball or when land held in the same family for generations is taken. Evolution of this magnitude does not happen in a vacuum.

A recent study suggests that consanguinity—or cousin-marriage—with consequent congenital abnormalities, is on the rise, perhaps as a stress response to the rapid fracturing of social ties, a way to circle the wagons and protect what is dearest, family. Genetic information is broadly disseminated in the press, which is note-worthy because until recently private issues of this sort were not addressed publicly. To date, Qatar has not forbidden cousin-marriage; but as of 2009, genetic testing is required, and couples are advised to follow their doctor's advice.

The decision not to mandate this personal decision fits well within international practice, as no laws forbid cousin-marriage in most of the world, including in the European Union. Only twenty-five states in the U.S. prohibit it under all conditions. The primary reason for close marriages is that people within the same family trust each other. Since cousin-marriage is an ancient practice in a region proud of its lineage, an attempt to mandate change would likely meet significant resistance. Rather, Qatar has created both a major new genetic research hospital and a public information campaign to enable prospective couples to make educated choices.

Tough issues face young people, particularly women, who are both the primary beneficiaries and the ones most affected by the rate of change. The question, "Are women oppressed?" inevitably arises when Middle Eastern countries are discussed. As in any country, there is a continuum and room for improvement, but for the most part Qatari women have opportunities most women elsewhere only dream about, such as free education through the university level and beyond if they are qualified. Women have the right to equality in education and employment, as well as the right to drive, vote and hold office.

Qatarias are active in claiming their prerogatives. For example, until recently women did not receive housing allowances, as did their male counterparts, since it was assumed they would be living either with their fathers or husbands. Only recently entering most professions, Qatari women will soon be tapping on the glass ceiling, and only the future will tell how successful they will be at cracking through.

In public forums, some female students express a desire to study overseas, which they say their families will not allow without a chaperone. This can be impossible due to the expense and difficulty of finding a family member who wants to spend an extended time abroad. Sometimes these young women compare themselves to their American peers who the Qatarias have been told can do whatever they want after age eighteen. Legally, this may be true, but in reality the situation is similar since many western parents exert great influence over their college-aged children's decisions, in addition to financing their education. The main discrepancy is that Qatari males face fewer familial restrictions on overseas travel and employment.



Women fill the halls of academia and the workforce. Their enrollment numbers in higher education exceed that of males and their achievement outstrips many of their male classmates as well, demonstrating that Qatari women have been quick to take advantage of the opportunities made available in the last two decades. Many have the luxury of maids, nannies and drivers who provide them the freedom to pursue a career. Still, the social impact of Qatari children being raised by foreign, often non-Arabic-speaking, caregivers is vigorously debated in the media and in mosques. Fundamentally, Qatari women shoulder the same burden as modern women the world over, balancing home and office. Add to this the desire to protect traditional values like cohesive families while enjoying the empowerment allowed by an increasingly open society and personal income, and the circumstances Qatari women face grow even more challenging.

Modest dress—the graceful, floor-sweeping robe called an *abaya* and the matching headscarf, the *shayla*—derives from religion; the black color, from tradition. No laws mandate veiling. *Abaya* are frequently form-fitting and so elaborately embellished with silks, beading and embroidery that their beauty and expense rival the finest evening gowns. The *abaya* and *shayla* are essentially national dress, just as the *thobe*, a long robe usually of white cotton but of darker wools in winter; the *ghutra*, a white or red-checkered head covering; and the *igal*, a double black rope ring around the ghutra, are for men.

The *niqab* is a black cloth face-covering. Some women wear it; most do not. Perhaps because it is such an arresting image, evoking thoughts of women coerced to cover in countries controlled by fundamentalists, it receives inordinate attention, as does the *batoola*, a metallic-looking linen mask that is still seen occasionally, primarily on older women. Not all women who cover their faces in Qatar are Qatari. Many are from other countries, such as Egypt, Sudan or Algeria, and even some American women married to Qatari men choose to wear the *niqab*.

Some families want women to cover their faces, and some women choose to cover for reasons of privacy, because in this small-town-sized population it increases their freedom of movement. There are a few men who wish their wives would leave their faces uncovered and accompany them to restaurants and other public places more frequently. More important than the degree to which women cover is the extent to which they are given freedom to pursue personal goals like education and careers. By that measure, Qatari women are not oppressed but quite liberated.

If mores in dress are complex social barometers, multiple marriages also raise multifaceted issues. Muslim men are allowed four concurrent wives, although the Qur'an and the **Prophet Mohammed** discouraged this practice. In reality, most Qataris are in monogamous relationships for a variety of reasons. Some believe monogamy is better, and others cannot afford more than one household even if they want more. *Sharia* law allows women to put whatever provisions they want in their marriage contracts, including those allowing them to continue their education after marriage and to get a divorce if their husband takes another wife. There is a gender disparity, since polyandry—a woman having multiple spouses—is forbidden, and wives face the possibility that a husband may try to take another wife. But Qatari women are not forced into polygamous marriages.

Muslims often include "Peace be upon him" (PBUH) after all prophets' names, including the Prophets Abraham, Jesus and Mohammed. This notation will not be included in this book but may be assumed. The Qur'an 4:3 states that a man should marry only one wife if he doubts that he can treat more than one equally. While not a complete prohibition, many interpret this surah to forbid polygamy since no mere mortal could pass the equal treatment test.






Coral


مخبز
عبودي



In the Gulf, "to sit" is an active verb. Sitting means sharing each other's time and food. It means sharing profound grief at a condolence call and glorying in the joy and splendor of a wedding party.

Indeed, there are women who willingly become a second, third or fourth wife in order to have children, or because they are in love or want a better standard of living. In some cases, particularly in the case of close family marriages, there can be a de facto separation without an official divorce. So while a woman may be a second wife, she may not be sharing a husband. Qatar has not seen combat on its soil recently, but in war-torn countries like Iraq and Afghanistan the huge loss of young men has meant that many women desiring a husband and children have few options other than accepting a polygamous marriage.

Undoubtedly, profound choice and change confront women in Qatar. Many young women express a desire to obtain more freedom without losing the benefits of their traditional life. Some of that tradition has to do with close family ties and the subservience of the individual to the group. Most women do not want to discard the protection and love of the family to achieve unfettered freedom, particularly since the grassroots and the political leadership already provide them with such rapidly expanding opportunity.

The world focuses on the status of Qatari women, but young men also face challenges. Men hold the vast majority of senior positions in Qatar, in which they (like the women) are proud to contribute to its development. At the same time, with few restrictions and ready access to cars and cash, many young men fall into an idle life. If women achieve more and young men less, there may eventually be more than a loss of productivity: A social rift could develop in which young people cannot find marriage partners with similar aspirations.

In a more immediately tragic situation, young men are dying in high numbers on the roads. High speeds and reckless driving once ranked Qatar as worst in the world for traffic deaths. Just as in other countries, making laws is not the challenge; enforcement is. In recent years, a public-private partnership has made visible headway, including increased professionalism of the traffic police, education and awareness campaigns, numerous radar cameras and a rigorous regulation of industrial vehicles. The focus on road safety is a visible example of Qatar's commitment to hold its citizens accountable for the well-being of the entire community.

Community is the essence of Qatar, and loyalty to family and tribe makes community, not the individual, the building block of society. For centuries, Arab tribes in Qatar co-existed in loose confederation, migrating regularly both by sea and land from Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, eastern Arabia and Persia. These nomadic tribes moved in and out, following elusive fodder for their camels and livestock and seeking or escaping tribal alliances and disputes. Settled coastal areas also organized along family and tribal lines, at times banding together to repulse intruding tribes from as far away as Oman or to make naval sorties along the Arabian coast and the islands of present-day Bahrain in order to control trade routes and pearl beds.

Tribal chiefs governed towns such as Al Zubarah, Al Thakira, Al Wakra, Fuwairet and Al Bidda (part of present-day Doha). Centralized governance and Gulf Arab dynasties evolved during the time the British sought to abolish piracy, maritime warfare and the slave trade. The British wanted peace in order to further their trade interests, and to do so they had to identify the most likely leaders with whom to negotiate. The Al Thani tribe emerged politically in the mid-nineteenth century when the British political resident (domiciled in Persia) began corresponding with Sheikh Mohammad bin Thani, identifying him as the "Bidda Chief". His position as the political leader of Qatar was reinforced when he signed a treaty with Great Britain in1868 that ended hostilities between Qatar and Bahrain.

The 1868 treaty also recognized the other leading tribes, whose leaders continued to exercise power within their territories, but Sheikh Mohammed acted for them on external matters. Al Thani hegemony solidified during the Ottoman occupation of 1871-1915. Sheikh Mohammed's son, Sheikh Qassim (or Jassim) bin Mohammed al Thani, acted as a deputy governor for the Ottomans while concurrently appealing to the British for a treaty of protection. Sheikh Qassim is credited with unifying Qatar, and December 18th, the date in 1878 on which he succeeded his father, is now celebrated as National Day. Before 2007, the national day was September 3, the date in 1971 on which Qatar became an independent country, nullifying its 1916 protection treaty with Great Britain. The change of date emphasizes Qatar's "Arabness" and makes the point that it was never a colony. Nationality is like another layer of history added to desert pride and is demonstrated annually with enthusiastic displays of the flag and folkloric dress.

Though Qatar has a strong national identity, its families and tribes still define the social order. Tribes proudly relate their histories and tell tales of the land or towns they used to control—but discreetly, so as not to revive old animosities. On celebration days, such as the marriage of the heir apparent and on national day, many of the tribes set up huge tents on empty lots scattered around Doha. There the men celebrate with *ardah*, sword dancing, and enormous feasts. Generosity was and is a primary measure of individual and tribal pride, so any passerby may drop in and be welcomed with traditional coffee and a place around the common platters of food.

Finding My Way | I clearly benefitted from my husband's status as the American ambassador, partly because people were curious about me and partly because their concept of an ambassador's wife differed so greatly from who I actually am. The general expectation was that I would be aloof, socializing only with a small elite of Qataris and the expatriate community. In truth, I wanted to take part in local life. I handed out my card unreservedly and went everywhere I was invited. Expatriates can get the impression that Qataris don't want to know them, because Qataris can seem reserved. This perception results not from a "clash of civilizations" but from what I call "a clash of shyness", a mutual misunderstanding of cultural norms.

In close-knit Qatari society, introducing yourself is rarely necessary. You either already know someone or a mutual friend will tell you who the person is before you meet him or her. Qataris shake hands and exchange pleasantries, but serious conversation waits until later, perhaps while seated over coffee. Westerners in Qatar may feel rebuffed when they give their names and get little or no response, such that they may never move beyond that initial reaction to any type of intimacy.

In the Gulf, "to sit" is an active verb. Sitting means sharing each other's time and food. It means sharing profound grief at a condolence call and glorying in the joy and splendor of a wedding party. It means kneeling around a heaping platter of rice and roasted lamb or waiting past exhaustion for your host to let you go home. Sitting means spending time together, the pathway to trust and affection.

Qatar is small enough that word travels quickly, and it seems my daily routine disarmed many, notably the pre-dawn dashes I made to farms to ride horses before the withering heat set in. While my husband zoomed around in traditional ambassadorial style in a three-car motorcade outfitted with lots of armor and firepower,



Nationality is like another layer of history added to desert pride and is demonstrated annually with enthusiastic displays of the flag and folkloric dress.

(opposite, above and following) Souq Waqif adorned with Qatari colors; *ardah*, sword dancing; pouring *qahwa,* a universal sign of hospitality in the Gulf; feast in a woven *bait al sha'ar*













I drove myself in the family car and treated his youthful entourage of Qatari bodyguards as though they were my sons. I feel that my acceptance into Qatari society came in part because I put aside the rank and privilege associated with being an ambassador's wife and entered fully into the community, including fasting during Ramadan, which gave me a spiritual bond with my neighbors.

Qatar 2022 will be the first time the football championship has been awarded to a country in the Middle East. Qatar's visionary plan includes carbon-neutral, modular stadium construction that will eventually provide 22 stadiums in developing countries.

I also volunteered actively, even luring my family into the desert to pick up trash from scorpion-infested brush and to the coast to plant mangroves. During the 2006 Doha Asian Games, one of the world's largest athletic events, I sported a bright yellow, blue and maroon uniform along with thousands of other volunteers and worked twelve-hour days to help make the Games a success. Qatar uses sports as a medium for international engagement and on December 2, 2010, won an historic bid to host the **World Cup** in 2022. The World Cup will bring hope and pride to the region as well as concrete economic activity as billions are spent on preparations. Building on the success of the Asian Games, the World Cup will bolster volunteerism and community action—key aspects of an effective civil society.

In the Asian Games I worked on the equestrian events, and it was perhaps my love for horses that contributed most to my relationships with local families. I had longed for Arabian horses since childhood, when my stepfather brought home Dorcus, a leggy, dark dapple-gray filly. She pranced and floated over green pastureland, her proud head and flashing eyes the legacy of a thousand years in the stark desert. The Qatari horse world provided a natural home for me. From the equestrian club to makeshift stalls in the desert, I shared a bond of horsemanship with many Qataris that allowed us to relate intimately, transcending age and gender. Our horses climbed dunes and followed glistening paths of moonlight through the salty Gulf along the shallow flats of the coastline. My husband called it "equine diplomacy," and to many in the horse world he was known as "the husband of the wife of the American ambassador".



Majlis Sitting | Outside the family quarters where ladies usually entertain, the *majlis* provides the setting for most social interaction. The *majlis* is several things: a place, an occasion and a type of governance. Literally a sitting-down, or an assembly, the *majlis* can take place in a formal hall with chairs lining the walls, in a living room, or in a *bait al sha'ar*—house of hair—which is the Bedouin wool and goat hair tent woven in wide swaths of earthy browns and beige. While the nomadic life belongs to a bygone era, many Qataris still yearn for the desert and set up *bait al sha'ar* for winter camping and weekend outings. During Ramadan, when the country slows down and deliberately embraces old ways, our embassy set up a tent in our front yard where we entertained large groups, ranging from government officials to students to ladies only. This *majlis* setting was embraced enthusiastically, and I still receive messages during Ramadan from friends who fondly recall those gatherings.

A *majlis* is open to all. One Bedouin friend told me that if a visitor arrives, you must not ask why they came for three days. While this extreme deference is probably rare today, it speaks to the obligation of hospitality born out of a ruthless environment. For a traveler in the desert, life and death could depend on the generosity of a chance encounter. Desert protocol respects relationships above all else; it is a matter of honor to give one's utmost to a guest.

Personal courtesy is not reserved only for guests; it showers every meeting—however mundane—with the blessings of God. The greeting *Salaam alaykum* (peace be upon you) and the response *Wa'alaykum salaam* (and upon you be peace) is exchanged when entering a home or *majlis* as well as when entering a shop or an office, or approaching an information counter.

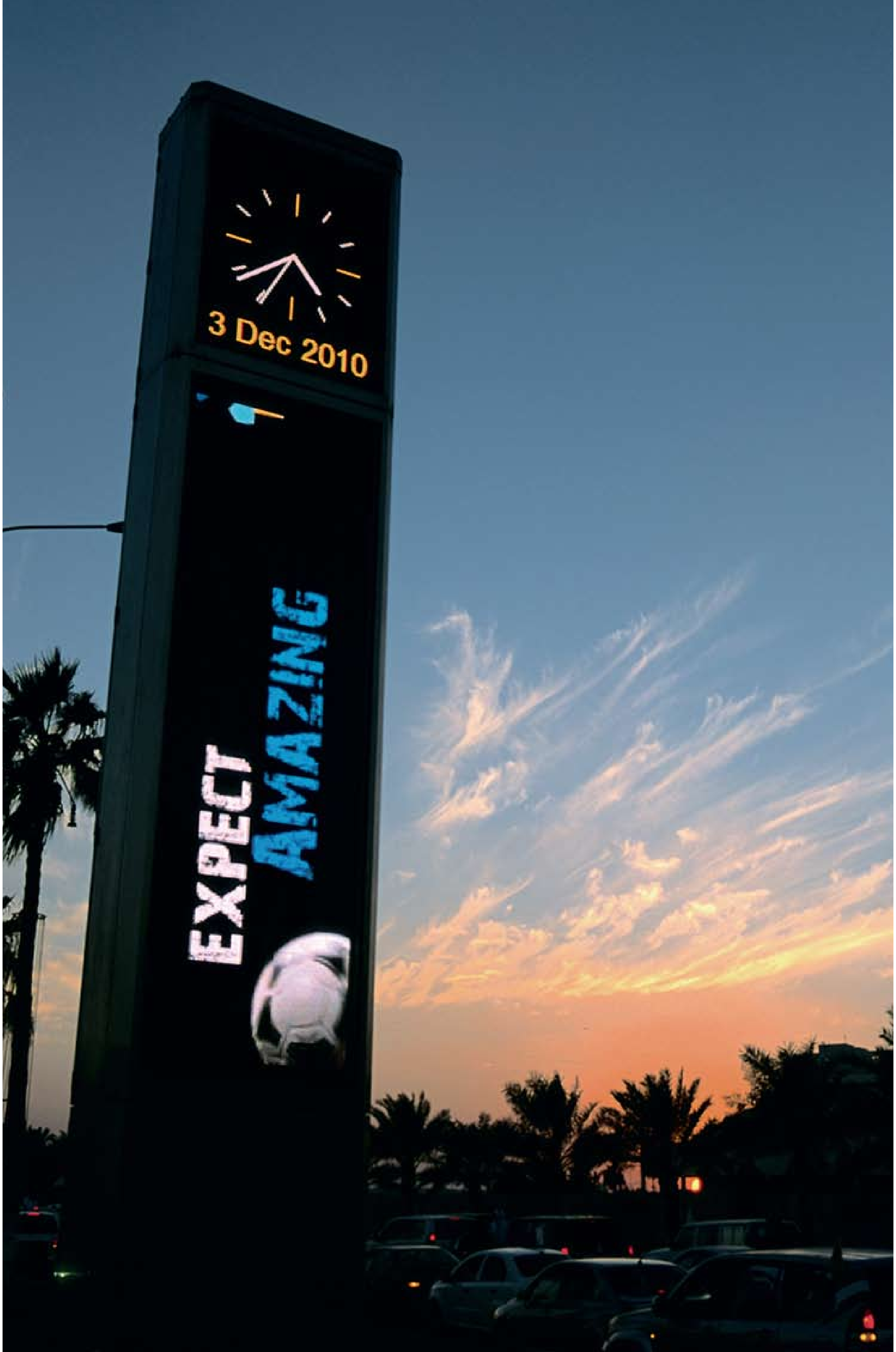
The *majlis* is also important to interpersonal relationships. Here, both personal and governmental business is done and favors are granted. People who are blessed with possessions have an obligation to share. In fact, in the traditional system, a leader's failure to provide for his people is reason enough for them to throw their support to another who will. In the past, Arab leaders were known not for the wealth they amassed but for how much of it they gave away. Even today, "stingy" is a biting criticism.



But, more than anything else, the *majlis* is about socializing. Whether the gathering is at a house or in a desert tent, the host offers tea, fresh fruit juices, and especially *qahwa*, a fragrant Arabic coffee made from lightly roasted beans and cardamom. Those of Bedouin lineage typically serve coffee first, while some *hadher* or town people serve the coffee at the end of a visit. Later, a censer is passed, wafting smoke of an earthy incense called *oud*. The highest quality of *oud* is agarwood, and this rare incense is sometimes burned in combination with valuable resins like frankincense and myrrh. Ladies often burn perfumed *bakhoor*, wood chips infused with fragrant oils. The aromatic smoke is waved into tresses of hair and the folds of robes. There is a saying that there is "no sitting after the *oud*." In other words, the visit is over after the incense is passed. An exception to this is at a large celebration like a wedding, when censers will be circulated periodically throughout the evening.

The World Cup will bring hope and pride to the region as well as concrete economic activity as billions are spent on preparations.

(opposite and following)
The Emir is received at a tribal celebration with a kiss on the shoulder, a sign of respect; World Cup bid slogan, "Expect Amazing"; Aspire Zone hotel, The Torch Doha; people celebrate until dawn after Qatar wins the bid to host the World Cup 2022


3 Dec 2010
EXPECT
AMAZING




2022


QATAR
QATAR



(above)

Camels in Souq Waqif silhouetted against FANAR, the Islamic Cultural Center

Carpets cover tent floors, and low upholstered cushions in bright, predominantly red and black Bedouin patterns provide seating. In the depths of winter, robes of camel hair or canvas lined with lambskin warm visitors huddled around the fire, known as the fruit of winter.

Carpets cover tent floors, and low upholstered cushions in bright, predominantly red and black Bedouin patterns provide seating. In the depths of winter, robes of camel hair or canvas lined with lambskin warm visitors huddled around the fire, known as the fruit of winter. Hot, sweetened camel's milk or warm cow's milk infused with ginger fend off the cold from the inside.

A prominent Qatari will "have his *majlis*" on a given day at a given time. But all that is needed to indicate a *majlis* is in session is to leave the gate open. Men participate in these open-invitation *majlis*, while women tend to invite their guests for more defined occasions. My agenda was not to break gender barriers, but in the course of events, I started visiting some men's *majlis*—at times with my husband and at others with male riders or other friends. A few non-Arab women achieve a sort of gender-neutral status, allowing them to move easily between male and female society. Certainly, the chance to make friends and learn from both sides of the house was a blessing, because while the public side of Qatari life is fully integrated, socially the gender division largely remains.

I enjoyed the distinct character of masculine and feminine, and it would be a mistake to assume women are trapped in dour circumstances. The ladies have fun. When I was with them, we danced, laughed, talked about anything and everything, and shared sumptuous meals. Children abound, and the intermingling of generations keeps families united. Few Qataris express dissatisfaction with gender segregation in private life, although many women would like their husbands to participate more in the life of the family rather than going out so often with their friends.

Some young people hope to establish new norms for relationships. In a society in which boys and girls don't interact socially after about age twelve except in some co-ed classrooms and work places, and in which marriages are typically arranged, romantic love is complicated. The term "arranged" is used loosely, since most Qataris do not consider the current match-making process to be arranged marriage, which is one made without the couple's prior consent. In the past, the bride in particular had little or no say in her choice of partner. Women have told me they were outside playing in the dirt with their siblings and cousins when called inside to be told they were to be a bride. A woman born in the early seventies told me she probably would be one of the last brides never even to see a photograph of her husband before the wedding celebration.

Most commonly now, a young man asks his mother and sisters to look for a wife for him. Mother and sisters then consider young women from within their circle of family and friends or someone they see at a wedding. They discreetly inquire about the young woman and describe her to the prospective groom; sometimes at this point or later in the process, photographs are available. If the young man accepts, his mother, often accompanied by his sisters, will visit the girl's family to determine her availability. Traditionally, if the families do not know each other, the visiting mother asks for a glass of water as a pretext to enter, but both sides know what the true purpose of the visit is, so marriage-age daughters would likely make an appearance.

Since courtesy and saving face is paramount, if the young woman is not interested in a proposal she will make a polite excuse like the need to finish school or pursue a career, avoiding an outright refusal. If both sides agree, a chaperoned meeting is arranged where the prospective couple can see each other and perhaps have a conver-

sation. And if the families decide to proceed, a contract is negotiated, stipulating the dowry to be paid by the groom to the bride as well as any provision the couple might want.

Officially, the couple is married when the contract is signed. In practice, an engagement period follows the contract, extending to a few months or even a year. During this time before the wedding celebration, the couple often speak to each other by phone or have chaperoned meetings. Many unions end during the engagement period. This is technically a divorce, a factor which causes the divorce statistics to look abnormally high. As long as one does not make a series of broken engagements, however, little stigma is attached to them.

In addition to the traditional path to matrimony, many dream of more contemporary relationships developed through knowing someone at school or work. Others utilize social networking technologies like Facebook to make contact with those they have seen at university or the mall. Another such method is Bluetooth, which allows electronic devices like mobile phones and PDAs to communicate wirelessly at short distances. If you are at a mall with Bluetooth enabled on your mobile, sooner rather than later you are likely to get an electronic ping from another device close by. As you look down at your phone, the other person will have a good idea whom he/she has pinged and may try to strike up a text conversation.

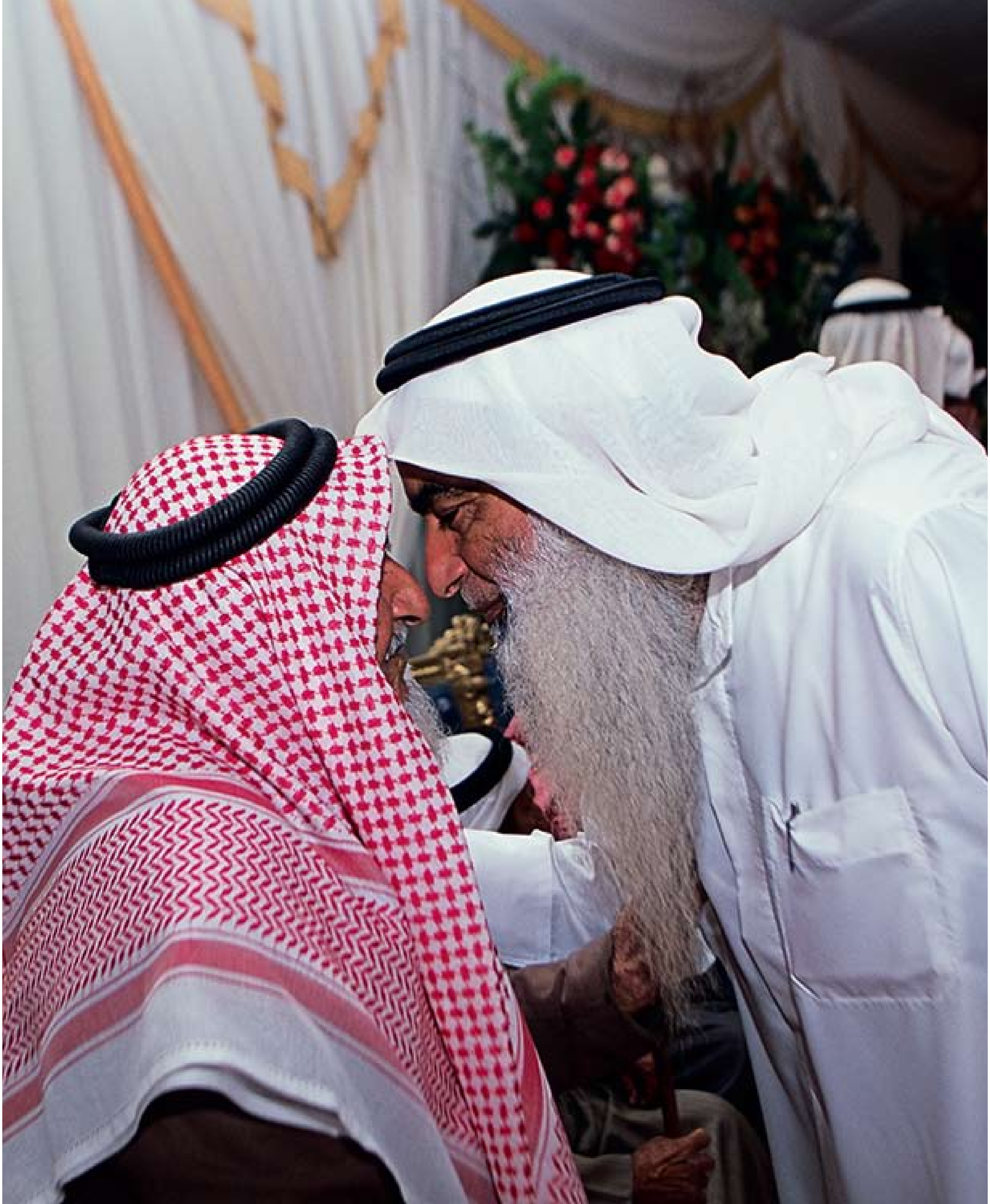
Unfortunately, relationships remain a challenge, and divorce is not uncommon in the younger generation, both in love matches and arranged marriages. But divorced men and women often remarry and lead happily settled lives. Another sign of changing social mores is that it is now possible to see young married Qataris lightly holding hands in the mall, an unheard-of display of affection when we arrived in 2004.

On the Public Side | Qatar combines capitalism with a generous welfare system. Utilities are free. Citizens receive free land and either a liberal subsidy to build a house or an interest-free loan. Government jobs are readily available. Over 80% of jobs are in the public sector, although some of those employees also run private businesses. Initial Public Offerings (IPOs) on the local stock exchange (bourse) are offered to citizens on easy terms. These quickly transfer public wealth into private hands without giving direct handouts. Individuals become responsible for their wealth rather than looking to the government for it. From infants to seniors, all Qataris have a stake in the market. A Qatari businessman estimated in 2010 that with good management, a family of five should have realized five million Qatar riyals (US$986,000) since 2002 when the IPO program began.

At the same time, there have been growing pains as the population adjusts to the angst of market fluctuations. Some fall prey to the lure of the fast profit and overextend in speculation. Particularly after the first IPOs, when stock prices jumped overnight, a number of inexperienced investors thought that stock prices would continue to surge and so borrowed money against land, houses and cars. When prices on the bourse dropped as any market can, the losses were devastating to many. Others squander money on fast cars, designer clothes and luxury vacations. Distributing the common wealth is imperative, but the challenge is to do it while teaching financial competence and without destroying self-reliance.



(above and following)
Sisters at a national day parade; bumping noses, a traditional desert greeting; horses in Arabian regalia; *ardah*; warming drums; Deputy Prime Minister and then-Energy Minister Abdullah bin Hamad Al Attiyah and the Armed Services Chief of Staff General Hamad bin Ali Al Attiyah















Education reform goes beyond schooling. The process has been so sweeping that education has become a primary method of socialization and a means to introduce democratic principles and transparency.

Just as in the rest of the world, the haves and the have-nots in Qatar soon will be defined by who is educated and who is not, because education will determine who prospers. Education reform goes beyond schooling. The process has been so sweeping that education has become a primary method of socialization and a means to introduce democratic principles and transparency. The government decided to make a rapid and aggressive transition to a new system rather to do it gradually. The result will produce a stronger graduate, but many people are caught in the transitional vacuum, unable to compete in the new system because the old system did not adequately prepare them. For example, some parents who only speak Arabic cannot help their children as English becomes the primary language of instruction. Some talented students with only limited exposure to English cannot pass entry exams at universities where English is required. Academic bridge programs and a new community college system established in 2010 are trying to keep young people from falling through such cracks.

This restructuring has taken place with unprecedented openness. Arab media typically report only positive news, and Qataris were not used to seeing their leadership criticize itself. Yet the government publicly acknowledged the failings of the old system, in particular that Qatari students had scored near the bottom of all countries on international standardized tests. It then addressed the anxiety created by the transition to the new schooling system by having educational and political leaders appear in public forums to answer questions and receive criticism. And in another dramatic departure from the norm, parents are encouraged to make active decisions in their children's education by choosing amongst the new independent schools (similar to charter schools), which have virtually replaced government schools.

Education is contributing to social changes as well. Men and women interact more and more, particularly in the workplace and at official events where women are taking active roles in public life. Often different standards dictate interaction with foreigners than with other Gulf residents, and gender relations can seem like shifting sands. A Qatari woman who might shake hands with a Westerner often just politely nods at a fellow countryman. A Muslim man's willingness to shake hands may vary depending on whether he has performed his ablutions in preparation for prayer. The polite gesture of placing the right hand over the heart substitutes for a handshake. Kissing on the cheek is as common between men as it is between women, which can come as a surprise to a foreign man who is unexpectedly honored by this sign of friendship. Arab men commonly link fingers lightly with their male friends too.

Mahram *are close kin whom one cannot marry, such as father, sons and uncles.*

One situation that commonly confounds Westerners is the notion that touching a woman renders a man "unclean." The origin of this religious taboo against touching by non-*mahram* is misinterpreted in our modern time. But during the Prophet Mohammad's time, unprotected women were easy targets for unwanted advances. Thus the taboo was more of a command for men to act respectfully than a derogatory judgment against women. With any religious text it is possible for both liberal and conservative thinkers to isolate passages that support their positions. In contrast to conventional Western thought, however, the Qur'an in the seventh century codified rights for women—like property ownership—which women in the West did not acquire until many centuries later.

All Things from God | Muslims from America to Indonesia, from Morocco to Mindanao all stress that Islam is more than a religion; it is a way of life. Islam is such a central feature of Qatar that it is impossible to give an accurate picture of the country without addressing it. Even Westerners quickly start using common Islamic expressions that are in everyday (sometimes every-minute) parlance in the Middle East. *Inshallah* (God willing) acknowledges that any worldly arrangement is subject to divine intervention. The ever-present refrain *al humdulillah* (thanks be to God) is used in the Gulf to give thanks whenever something good happens, after a meal or a sneeze, and even after a tragedy, because Islam believes that everything comes from Allah. As with most religions, Islam teaches that mere humans cannot discern the cosmic plan, so we should be thankful for all things that happen in our earthly existence. This acceptance of the works of God's hand brings peace in the face of hardship as well as a deep appreciation of blessings.

It is challenging to reconcile this pure practice of Islam with the extremism too often portrayed in the media. Many abuses committed in the name of Islam are based more on culture, tradition and politics than on a precise reading of the Qur'an. Fortunately, Qatar's wealth and enlightened approach to education, employment and women's rights have exempted it from much of this experience, but few governments operate in a vacuum that excludes the sacred. The United States, a bastion of secular democracy, has been swayed by tides of revivalism since before its founding. China, officially atheist, is buffeted by renewed popular interest in Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. And each Middle Eastern country has its distinctive dialectic between the mosque and state.

A comparison of holy texts and subsequent interpretations illuminates the common compassionate core of the three great monotheistic faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam. All issue a divine call for *salaam*, *shalom*, peace while also glorifying those who protect their faith. Militant jihadists believe they are defending Islam and that if they give their lives in the course of a suicide mission they will go straight to heaven as martyrs. This is not a uniquely Islamic point of view; the medieval Christian Crusaders likewise believed they would go to heaven if they died fighting for their faith. Yet it is crucial to recognize that the majority of Muslims define jihad not as a call to arms but as an individual obligation to refrain from doing wrong and to seek peace, understanding and knowledge.

A dynamic leader, Qatar forges a productive and progressive Islamic society at home and tries to create concrete opportunity among the less affluent abroad. Desperation leads to desperate actions. Many countries in the Middle East and North Africa have been beset by corruption, poverty, a lack of democracy, and a modernity that primarily benefits the elite and leaves the majority feeling confused, betrayed and voiceless. This has opened the doors to demagogues. Violence has become one way some people deal with a feeling of powerlessness. While no amount of desperation justifies terrorism, it is clearly a reason why so many young people are attracted to these movements. No nation is exempt from this scourge, and by energetically creating opportunity Qatar attempts to provide a positive alternative and a wellspring of hope.

House of Wisdom | Sheikha Moza once told me that Qatar has no excuse not to succeed because of its small size and vast resources. But Qatar not only focuses on internal success; it also shares its wealth with other nations in countless ways. The charitable foundation, Reach Out to Asia (ROTA), founded by the Emir and Sheikha Moza's daughter Sheikha Al Mayassa bint Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, builds schools from Gaza



(above and following)
Students at the Sheikh Faisal bin Qassim Al Thani museum on his farm near Al Sheehaniya; Arabian orxy on the farm are part of a heritage plan to rebuild herds of this endangered animal

A dynamic leader, Qatar forges a productive and progressive Islamic society at home and tries to create concrete opportunity among the less affluent abroad.






Qatar does not hesitate to import expertise, but when it does, it emphasizes a collaborative approach that broadens the capabilities of its own citizenry.

to Thailand. Qatar sent an unsolicited $100 million dollars to aid Hurricane Katrina victims in America in 2005. Education City provides generous scholarships to needy students from the region, and the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF) supports collaborative researchers worldwide. Silatech, which means "your connection" in Arabic, is a new non-profit initiative from the Qatar Foundation that addresses the regional crisis of unemployment by giving commercial incentives to global business to create jobs, support entrepreneurship and make capital accessible to young people. In these ways Qatar balances its financial good fortune with magnanimous public responsibility.

How Qatar fuses Islamic tradition and tribal codes with modern systems is the current challenge. Progress is driven by the combined force of private citizens and public policy in delicate balance. Will the balance hold, allowing Qatar to fulfill its goals of modern education, open society and human rights while still remaining grounded in the essentials of family and religion? Will the ethical codes of the desert survive the fast-paced journey of today's children?

Increasingly, there is open debate, which is not only allowed but encouraged. There is more discussion about political and social issues in the press. Northwestern University opened a branch campus in 2008 containing its renown School of Communication and Medill School of Journalism. Al Jazeera indisputably blew open the gates to modern media coverage in the entire region. Qatar TV hosts a show called *Lakom Al Karar* (*The Decision is Yours*), which is similar to a town hall meeting. Prominent figures like the Heir Apparent and cabinet ministers answer questions from a live audience. There are similar opportunities for public venting on local radio. This new conversation is like a traditional *majlis* session incorporating contemporary technologies.

The internationally broadcast Doha Debates (a project of the Qatar Foundation) tackle topics such as the separation of mosque and state and whether a Muslim woman should be free to choose her spouse. The excitement spawned by these debates has led many students to create debating societies at school. The national high school debate team inspired a documentary that was the crowd favorite at the first Doha-Tribeca Film Festival in the fall of 2009. Nurturing not only freedom of speech but also encouraging respectful dialogue in young people should in time counter a common malady, that of media self-censorship. Because Qatar is such a small environment, it is easier to publish the positive than the negative. There has been extensive discussion in the press and over the air that the lack of probing journalism about Qatar comes more from the media's desire to avoid controversy or possible political reaction than from any overt censorship. Outspoken youth at the Doha Debates and other forums give the impression that more scrutiny is coming. As nationals graduate from Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism in Qatar, they may have more latitude to ask the hard questions from which expatriate reporters shy away.

Teaching its citizens to question the status quo seems the surest sign that Qatar is serious about developing a vocal, active populace. Although Qatar's foray into democracy is still limited, the Emir has stated that participatory government with a basis in Islamic teaching will come. Building a strong civil society is a necessary underpinning, since even the most eloquent advocates for democracy express concern that hasty elections might provide an opportunity for a fundamentalist backlash to roll back progress, particularly the advancement of women.

(opposite and following) An audience enjoying the Qatar Philharmonic Orchestra—a fusion of Western and Oriental instruments and music—at the opening of the first Doha Tribeca Film Festival; a mosque dome and dovecote at Katara, the cultural village; the Syrian Inana troupe performs *The House of Wisdom*; the Islamic Museum of Art designed by I.M. Pei: fountains, atrium set for a gala dinner, grand staircase and fireworks

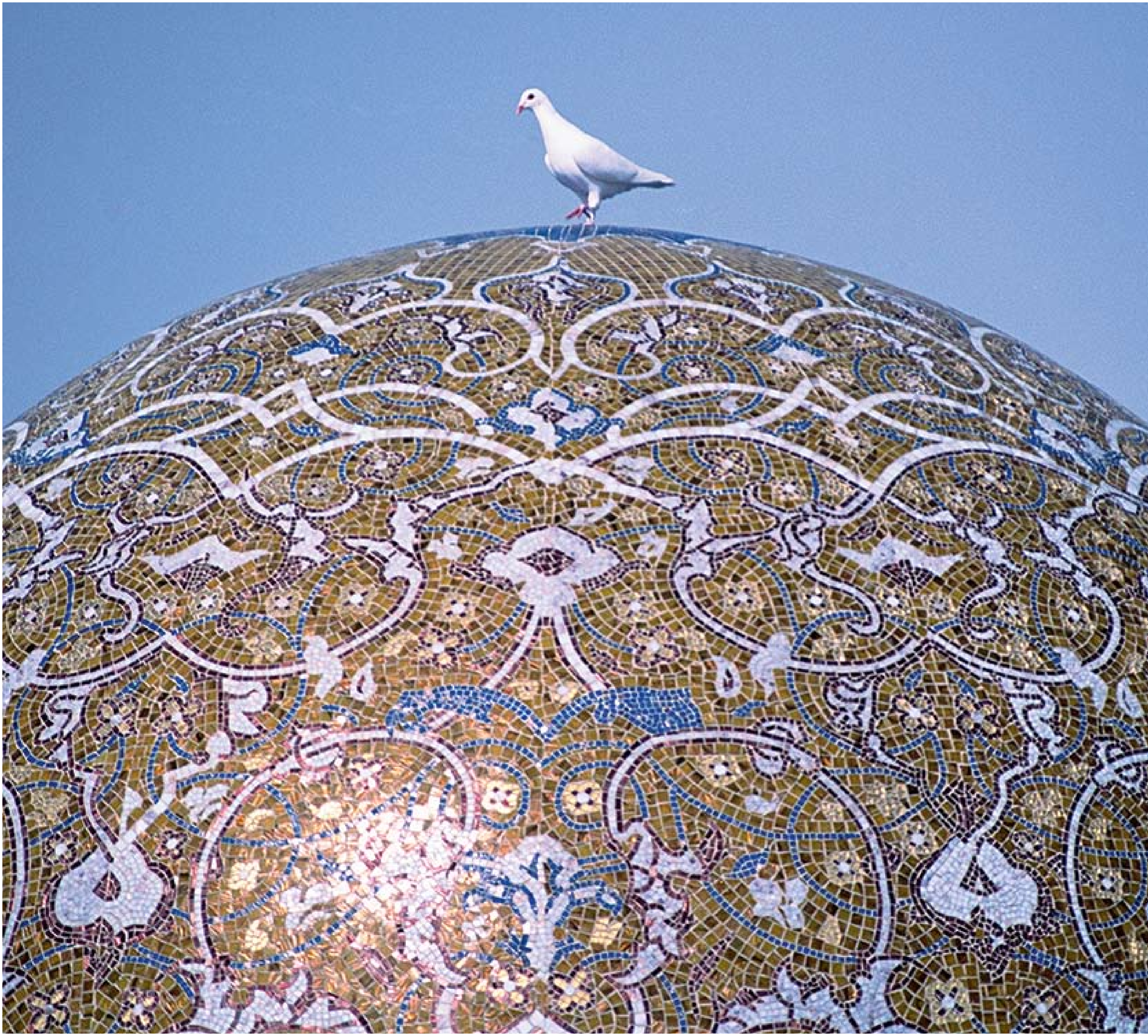
Qatar's clear, forward-thinking national agenda fosters organic growth. Consideration of need is a bigger motivator than breaking records or building the flashiest projects. Ample oil and gas revenues allow Qataris to be selective about how they expand their economic base, and projects are planned with a purpose, namely the long-term benefit of the people. There will be hurdles to clear along the way, but Qatar's progress makes it a notable part of a renaissance in the Arab world.

As capital of Arab culture in 2010 (a UNESCO initiative), Doha celebrated the occasion with a production of *The House of Wisdom*, a drama about the center of scientific and artistic learning established in Baghdad in the court of the Abbasid caliphs Harun and Abdulla ibn Harun Al Rashid in the late eighth century. While the cultural celebration rotates annually among Arab capitals, Doha strives to be a permanent hub of knowledge and culture. Qatar does not hesitate to import expertise, but when it does, it emphasizes a collaborative approach that broadens the capabilities of its own citizenry. And if the ambitious roster of future museums, libraries, conservatories, theaters and concert halls even approaches the acclaim accorded the I.M. Pei-designed Museum of Islamic Art (which opened in 2008), Doha will become a cultural capital rivaling any international city.

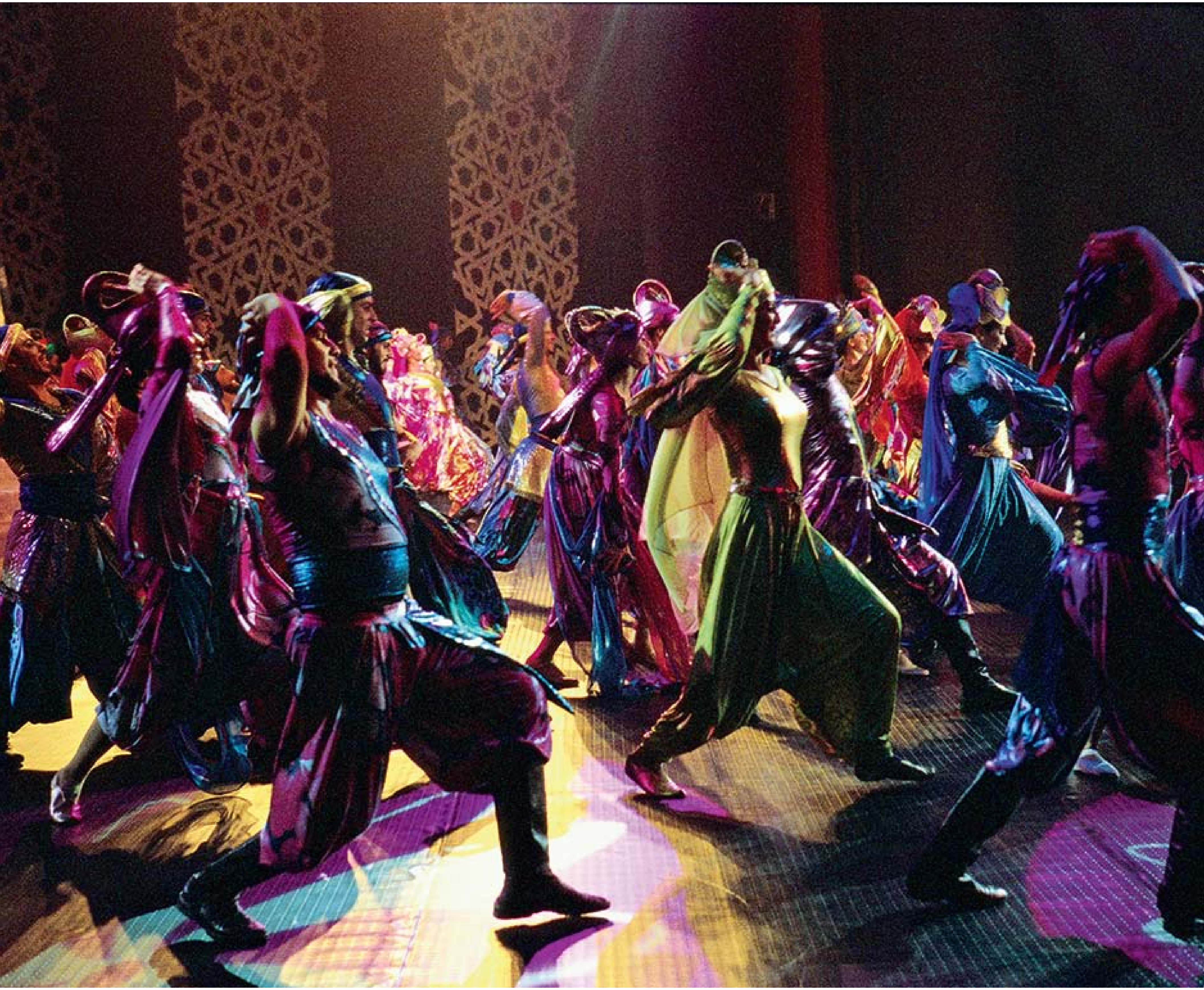
Sand, Sea and Sky | All cultures are shaped by their environment, and this is apparent as Qataris flock to the rustic fish markets in the early morning or wrap their faces with *ghutras* against the wind and sand as they have in centuries past. Even though affluence ensures that Qataris do not have to face the privations of the desert or the hardship of long months at sea, theirs is a proud heritage. Not only do they remember their history but they keep tradition alive in social interactions, recreation and daily prayers. The perseverance proven in past times is needed now to build a stable and successful future. While no one desires a return to a time of almost constant deprivation, neither does anyone want future generations to forget the sheer fortitude it took their ancestors to build lives in this land of sweeping sand, sea and sky. Every day offers the chance to be intrigued by some ancient custom or to be astounded by another superlative initiative as you explore the blending of the old and the new, the traditional and the modern, in this vibrant place called Qatar.

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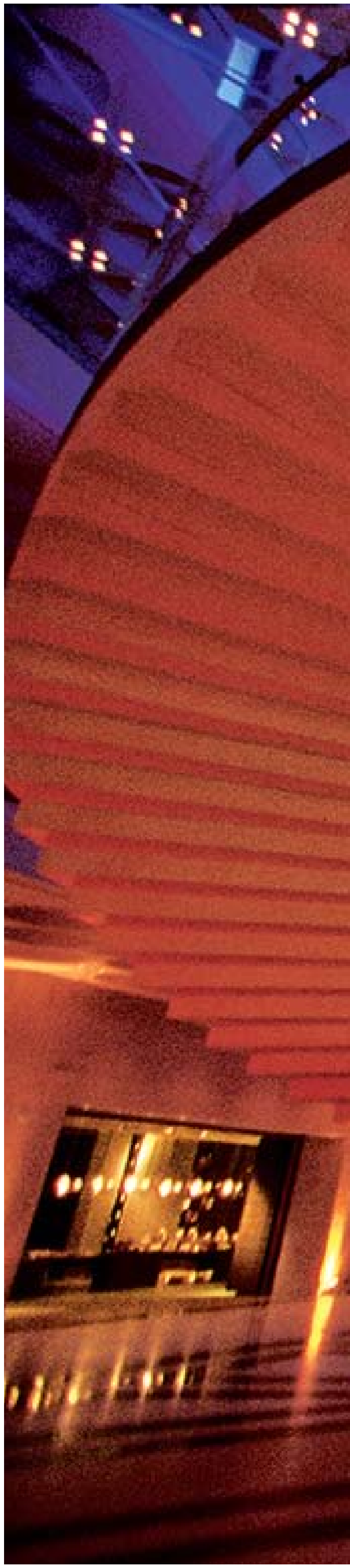


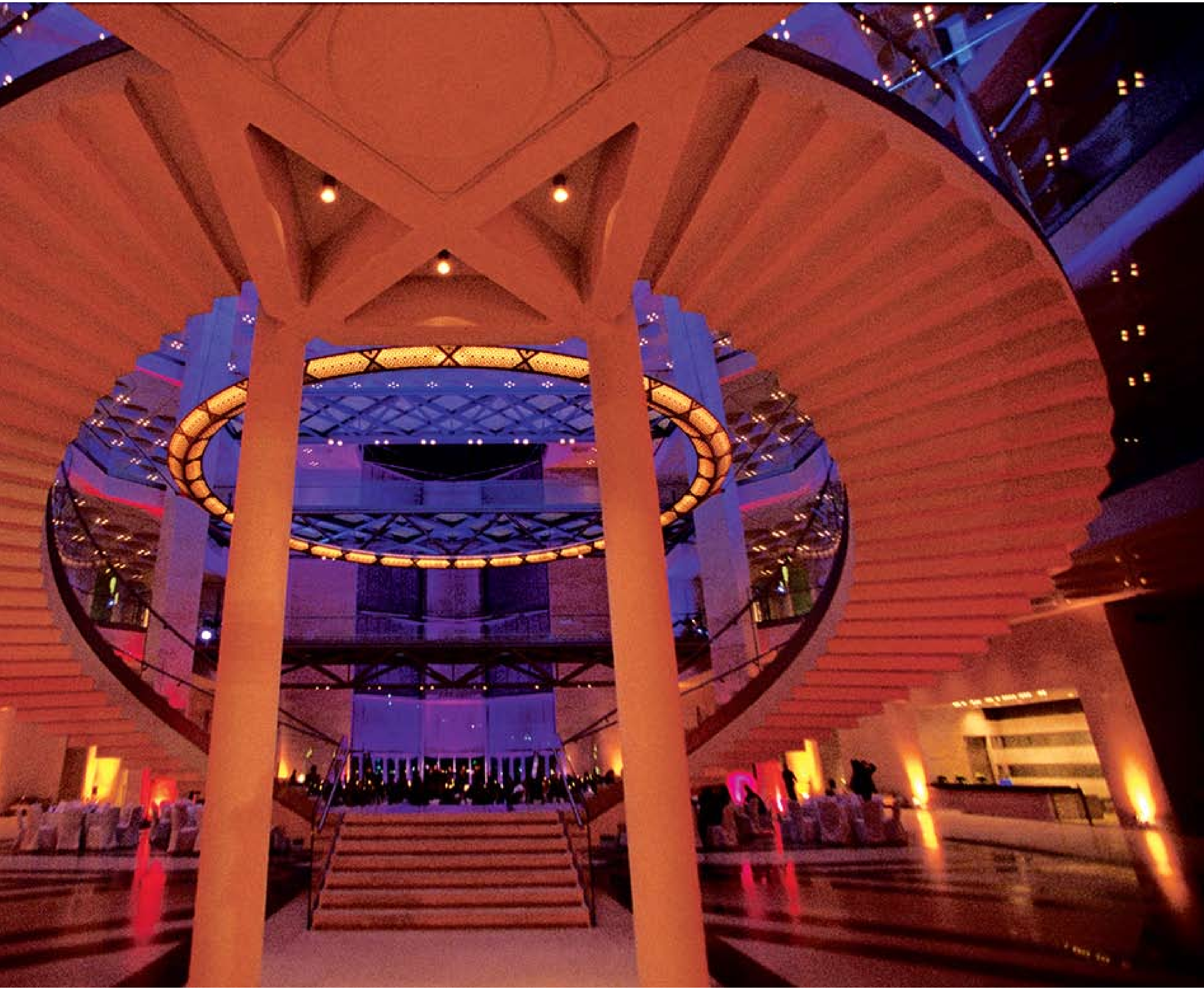











doha
tribeca
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